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BLOWING CLEAR

By JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

HEAD TIDE
BLOWING CLEAR
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THE BIG MOGUL
QUEER JUDSON
RUGGED WATER
DOCTOR NYE
FAIR HARBOR
GALUSHA THE MAGNIFICENT
THE PORTYGEE
"SHAVINGS"
MARY-'GUSTA
CAP'N DAN'S DAUGHTER
THE RISE OF ROSCOE PAINE
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KENT KNOWLES: "QUAHAUG"
CAP'N WARREN'S WARDS
THE DEPOT MASTER
OUR VILLAGE
PARTNERS OF THE TIDE
THE OLD HOME HOUSE
CAPE COD BALLADS
THE MANAGERS

Blowing Clear

By JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

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CHAPTER I

MR. SAMUEL HAZEN was a trifle worried: If this statement should appear in print to-day, as applicable to Mr. Hazen's mental condition at the present moment, a great many other people would begin to worry. The faith of shareholders in certain large corporations might waver ever so little; officials in banking houses would whisper apprehensively to one another; men looking over the ticker in stockholders' offices in many cities would suddenly become conscious of the state of their margins; reporters from great dailies would be ordered to obtain interviews. For Samuel Hazen to worry now is almost a national calamity. Then—in August, of a year very early in the century—it was important only to Samuel Hazen, or the members of his family, for he, although already a wealthy, prosperous and influential man of affairs, was not the personage he has since become.

And his worry on this occasion had nothing whatever to do with finance or business; it was wholly concerned with his exact whereabouts. He was seated at the wheel of the twenty-five foot motor boat he had bought that summer and that boat was, according to his rather vague guess, at least fifteen miles from the nearest dry land. Below the boat's keel were he did not know how many feet, or fathoms, of salt water, water rising and falling in long, slow, greasy swells. Ahead, astern, and to port and starboard those swells were visible but a short distance before melting into a curtain of gray fog. Hazen was alone in the boat, to all appearances he was alone in the world. And he did not like it.

He, with his wife and three-year-old daughter—accompanied of course by Mrs. Hazen's personal maid and the

nurse—had been sojourning for the past four weeks at the Nauticook Inn in the village of Nauticook on the Massachusetts coast. It was the family's first visit to that locality and Mrs. Hazen had been pretty thoroughly bored, although she did admit that the month by the sea had perhaps been pleasant and beneficial for Ruth, the small daughter. Ruth had had a good time and that was something, she supposed. The fact that her husband, Ruth's father, had also enjoyed himself did not materially count one way or the other. Except as representing a source of very liberal supply Samuel was distinctly a poor third in all the Hazen family considerations of comfort and happiness.

Nevertheless he, too, had had a good time. He loved the water and to be in or on or about it was his conception of real sport. Before leaving New York he had ordered the motor boat delivered in Nauticook harbor and it was there, awaiting him, upon his arrival at the Inn. The name *Ruth,* was, as per his direction, lettered upon the stern of the smart little craft. Mrs. Hazen had, as Nauticook would have expressed it, turned up her nose at the *Ruth* when she saw it and, after one experimental voyage to Setuckit Point and return, during which excursion she managed, in spite of a flat calm, to be wretchedly indisposed, had declared that never again would she set foot in the dreadful thing. She was, however, quite indifferent as to her husband's feet; he might set them wherever he chose, and as often, provided that he did not interfere with her ease and enjoyment. So he—sometimes accompanied by his daughter and the nurse, but more often alone—cruised for miles up and down the waters washing the low, sandy coast, sometimes fishing, almost always smoking a battered brier pipe, and, for a time at least, carefree and happy.

The present trip was to have been his last of the season. The family were leaving the Inn the following day. Mrs. Hazen, Ruth and the maids, were going to the mountains

for the month of September and Samuel was returning to his Broad Street offices and hard work. The morning had been clear and fine; bright sunshine and a light breeze from the southwest. Hazen had ordered a luncheon put up for him at the Inn and had gone early to the pier where the *Ruth* was moored. He had no destination in mind; he was just going somewhere to chug aimlessly back and forth, far enough out to hear nothing except the wash of the waves and see nothing except the outline of the shore with the church spires and roofs of Nauticook against the sky line on the one hand, and water, sky and an occasional steamer or tug or schooner on the other.

Characteristically he did not ask Cap'n Ben Hopkins, the tarry ancient in charge of the Inn pier and boats, for a weather forecast. If he had done so, Ben, after a puckered stare at the horizon, would undoubtedly have called his attention to the low-lying cloud bank in the east.

"Fog out yonder," Ben would have said, pointing a crooked finger. "Um-hm—yus—and smurrin' up some over to the west'ard, too. Bound to drift in, that fog is, afore the afternoon's over, and smur up more and rain by tomorrow. Shouldn't wonder if the wind hauled around and she come on to blow afore night. Um-hm . . . Yus. . . ."

As, however, Mr. Hazen asked for no information, Cap'n Ben volunteered no prophecies, that being his custom. He helped to draw the *Ruth* up to the wharf, passed the lunch box and coffee bottle aboard, and watched the motor boat move out across the inlet to the entrance of the channel leading to blue water beyond.

"Huh!" muttered Ben, in disgust, adjusting the gnawed remnant of a plug between his teeth and tugging free a liberal mouthful. "Huh: them that knows everything can't be told nawthin'. . . . Needn't blame me, that's all. *I* ain't paid to be no dry nurse, as I know of. . . . Eh? Well, what's eatin' you, Irve? Anything special?"

The question was addressed to Irving Blount, his helper in the busy season. Irving, who had sauntered down the pier, his hands in his pockets, seemed suddenly to have remembered something. He was gazing after the *Ruth* with a doubtful expression on his freckled face.

"Say, Ben," he demanded, "did you fill up that fellow's tank this mornin'?"

"Eh? . . . No, why should I fill it? Never asked me to, he never. Did he ask you?"

Blount pulled reflectively at his long nose. "Seems to me he said somethin' about how somebody might better take a look and see how much gas there was aboard," he admitted. "That was yesterday afternoon; I was kind of busy then and I never thought of it again till just now. Kind of queer you didn't look, Cap'n, you most generally 'tend to them things yourself, you know."

It was an injudicious remark, for Cap'n Ben's dyspeptic stomach had for some time been acutely conscious of the doughnuts and extra cup of coffee with which he had topped off his breakfast that morning.

"Do tell!" he snarled. "Is that so! Well, far's that goes I 'most generally have to 'tend to about all the work that's done around this wharf. Go get a bucket and a swab and scrub down them steps. Lively now! Cripes t' mighty! I never see—"

And so on, long after his assistant had gone in search of the bucket and swab. Other guests of the hotel came down to engage rowboats or to discuss arrangements for sailing parties and the *Ruth's* gasoline tank was forgotten.

Samuel Hazen himself had almost forgotten it, or, on the one occasion when the thought crossed his mind, he remembered the order he had given Blount and assumed, of course, that it had been obeyed. Taking advantage of the smooth sea and fair weather he headed the boat out to the edge of the ship channel, where the coasting craft, under

steam or sail, passed back or forth, bound to Boston or the "Down-East" ports, or, if in the opposite direction, to New Bedford or New York or further south. He chugged lazily along and, when opposite the Setuckit Point light, ate the luncheon prepared for him in the Inn kitchen. It was not until nearly one o'clock, when he was at least fifteen miles from home, that he suddenly became conscious of the coming change in the weather.

A puff of wind from the east, and a sudden dimming of the brilliant sunshine in which he had basked all the forenoon awakened him to the imminence of the change. With the tin cup of coffee in his hand he turned and looked toward the eastern horizon. That horizon had moved since he last looked at it. Instead of being miles and miles away, it was now ever so much nearer. And the gray streak which had hung along it was now a broad smudge reaching halfway to the zenith. Hazen might know little of fog in the distance, but, close at hand, he recognized its possibilities. He spun the wheel quickly and headed the *Ruth* back in the direction from which she had come. He was a long way, altogether too long, from Nauticook harbor. Negotiating that harbor entrance in fair weather was a man's job, even though that man was as accustomed to boats as was he. In a fog and an easterly wind it became a job he had no desire to tackle. He was not in the least afraid, but he was far from being a fool, and he realized the desirability of making port in a hurry.

The fog caught him before he had made four of the fifteen miles. It swept down upon him, passed over him, wrapped him in a damp, opaque smother, which shut out the rest of creation, and left him the center of a little circle bordered on all sides by nothing whatever.

A compass was a part of the boat's equipment—he had been enough of a sailor to provide that safeguard against contingency—and it was in one of the lockers. He left his

seat by the wheel and went forward in search of it. While there it occurred to him to inspect the state of the fuel tank. Then he made the unpleasant discovery that that tank had not been filled; there was perhaps an inch of gasoline remaining, but not more than that.

He swore, and expressed his opinion of Irving Blount aloud. Then, compass in hand, he returned to the wheel, filled and lighted his pipe, and cogitated as to what to do next. The obvious thing was, of course, to get as near home as he could before the gasoline was exhausted. Nauticook lay, he figured, a trifle east of north, and he headed in that direction, steering by compass. What he should do in the event of his reaching the harbor mouth, and recognizing it when he did reach it, he did not attempt to consider. To follow that crooked, breaker-bordered channel in such a fog would be, for him, an impossibility—he knew it. At the worst he might anchor outside the breakers and wait. If it should come on to blow, if the now easterly breeze increased—

Well, it had not increased perceptibly as yet, and he had enough on his hands already without borrowing trouble. The *Ruth* slid onward over the long swells, and Hazen, his eyes on the compass beside him, kept her on the course. The sense of being utterly alone, which had come upon him with the arrival of the fog, was now changing to an apprehension that there was too much company for safety. There were other bewildered wayfarers afloat and in his vicinity and they, although invisible, were audible enough in all conscience.

The agonized groan which, at minute intervals, came from somewhere far, far ahead must be, he judged, the great foghorn at Trumet light. The long-drawn screech and howl from away astern was probably the siren on the Hog's Back lightship. These sounds were, so to speak, motherly and protecting and, in a way, comforting. But all these others,

here, there and everywhere, were the wails of lost children, announcing the fact that they were lost.

Somewhere off the starboard bow and drawing steadily nearer, a tramp steamer coughed hoarsely. Nearer, and broad abeam, a tug whistled. Further astern, but still to starboard, thank goodness, a bell—an old-fashioned dinner bell it sounded like—was jingling. From away ahead drifted the tiny clatter of a pan beaten with a stick. Hazen made another excursion to the locker, found his own hand-powered foghorn, and added its feeble toot to the lugubrious concert.

The *Ruth* still moved onward; there must have been more gasoline in the tank than he had figured. How many miles she had traveled, or of her whereabouts, her skipper had not the least idea. Then, from almost directly ahead, but this time a trifle to port, a new and absolutely unexpected sound became audible—the barking of a dog.

At first, when Hazen identified the barks as barks, the thought flashed upon him that his blind course must have been laid too far to the west; he must be closer to shore than he had calculated and this dog in the yard of a home by the beach above or near Nauticook village. He slowed the boat down and listened. Except at the entrance of the harbor channel the long stretches of beach were open to the ocean and the surf roared there always. He could hear no surf.

Yet the dog continued to bark and the barking was plainer than when he first heard it. He increased speed ever so little and, except that he now steered a bit nearer due north, kept to his course. His right hand held the wheel; his left industriously tooted the little foghorn.

The barking was very near now; the dog, apparently, was throwing his soul into the performance. Hazen slowed down again.

"Hello!" he shouted. And again, "Hello!"

His hail was answered. A "Hello!" like an echo answered it.

"Hello!" yelled Hazen for the third time. "Hello, there. Where are you?"

There was excitement in his yell, excitement and apprehension, but the voice which replied was singularly calm and matter of fact.

"Right here," it said.

The *Ruth* was barely moving now. Hazen rose and, his hand on the wheel, leaned forward, peering into the fog. Another minute and in the dimness ahead a gray blotch showed, grew darker, took shape, became a boat at anchor. A man in oilskins and a sou'wester was standing amidships of this boat, a line leading from each of his hands to the water. Perched on the bow a fuzzy little dog was barking himself into convulsions. Hazen drew a long breath.

"By George, I'm glad to see you!" he exclaimed.

The man, who was swaying easily back and forth alternately raising and lowering first one line and then the other, continued to sway and pull.

"A fellow's glad to see 'most anything a day like this," he agreed, calmly.

One of the lines he was holding seemed to claim his attention. He tugged at it sharply, then, dropping the other, drew it in hand and over hand across the gunwale. He lifted a flapping cod into the boat, thumped its head with a wooden club lying beside him on the thwart, threw the fish into an open box, rebaited the hook, tossed it overboard, picked up the other line and resumed his swaying.

"Looks as if the fishing was good," observed Hazen.

"'Twas just then. . . . Oh, shut her off, Jack, you're wastin' steam."

The order was apparently addressed to the dog, who stopped barking, sat down, and regarded the *Ruth* and her skipper with interest. The nose of the Hazen craft was

abreast the stern of the fish boat now. Hazen reached out and held it in that position.

"Say," he asked, earnestly, "do you know where we are?"

"Yes, where or thereabouts."

"You're lucky. I haven't the least idea. You see—"

He gave a hurried résumé of his troubles, ending with his discovery of the shortage of fuel. The man in the other boat listened, without interrupting, till the recital ended. Then, after he had pulled in another fish, a haddock this time, and both lines were again over the side, he spoke.

"Want me to let you have some gas?" he inquired. "I can do that, if you don't want too much."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't help a great deal."

"Well, gas is supposed to help that kind of boat to keep goin'."

"Yes, but that's just it; I don't know that I want to keep going. I don't know where to go. Where is Nauticook, anyway?"

The man motioned with his head.

"About a dozen mile over yonder. That is, unless it's gone adrift since mornin'."

Hazen looked in the direction indicated. He could see perhaps fifty feet.

"No, thank you; not for mine, just now," he declared. "Perhaps there are smart enough pilots to negotiate that channel in a fog like this, but I'm not one of them. Did you come from Nauticook this morning?"

"Yes."

"And you're going back there?"

"Cal'late to—later on."

"You mean when the fog lifts?"

"If it lifts when I'm ready to go."

"If it doesn't you'll go anyway?"

"Um-hm."

There was a crisp, everyday finality in the tone of that

"Um-hm" which shut off argument. Hazen shook his head.

"Whew!" he whistled. "Well, I— Say, my friend, do you mind if I stick around here and—and wait for you?"

"No. . . . Stick away."

Hazen let go of the fish boat's stern and prepared to lower the *Ruth's* anchor. The other man looked up from his lines.

"Wouldn't go to all that bother," he said. "Haul her in and make her fast aft there. Take a couple of hitches with your rode through that ring. She'll ride easy that way; tide's pretty nigh on the full."

The hitches were taken and the *Ruth,* now attached to the other boat, swung off astern. Hazen turned up the collar of his jacket; the dampness was penetrating. His neighbor drew in and landed another cod. Then, leaving the lines atrail in the water, he went forward, stooped over a partially opened hatch, drew out an oilskin slicker similar to the one he was wearing and tossed it aboard the *Ruth.*

"Put that on," he ordered.

Hazen gratefully donned the garment. It was covered with cod scales, ancient, stained and decidedly fragrant.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "Much obliged, Captain—er—"

"My name's Heath."

"Mine is Hazen. Thank you, Captain Heath."

"You're welcome, Cap'n Hazen."

"You flatter me. I'm no captain."

"Neither am I."

"You're not? Why, it seemed to me that every third man I've met since I came to Nauticook was a captain."

"He is. I'm the fourth."

From the fog abeam came a heavy thuttering roar. It was near enough to cause Hazen to start and look over his shoulder.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, nervously.

"Another calf loose," was Heath's comment. "All right, Jack; turn her on."

The fuzzy dog, who during this conversation had been curled up in the bow of the fish boat, was now on his feet and quivering with eagerness. At the word from his master he burst into a splutter of shrill barks. The heavy roar sounded again—and yet again. The third blast, however, was a trifle more distant. Heath grunted.

"He's clearin' for deep water," he observed. "Probably figures he was abreast of somebody's back gate."

"I don't wonder. One doesn't expect a dog off here." Then, with a laugh, "I see; the dog is your foghorn, eh? That's a new one on me."

"New one on that fellow, too, I guess likely. He's a half mile further off shore already. . . . That'll do, Jack. Shut down."

The dog curled up again. Hazen was much amused.

"Smart dog," he observed. "His name's Jack, eh?"

"No, his name's Nuisance."

"But you called him Jack, didn't you?"

"Yes."

Another fish, on the starboard line this time, occupied the Heath attention. Hazen, who had, naturally, expected an explanation, waited. After a wait of several minutes he asked for it.

"Why?" he inquired.

"Why what?"

"Why do you call him Jack if that isn't his name?"

"Oh, it sort of tagged onto him natural. He's part of the game."

"What do you mean? What game?"

Heath was rebaiting a hook. When the question was repeated he answered without looking up.

"Oh, the game at our house. I live at Seven-up. Jack, he lives there, too."

"Seven-up? What is that?"

The hook, having been baited, was thrown over. Heath took a pipe from one pocket and a paper package of tobacco from another.

"Hold on a minute," suggested Hazen. "Here! Have one of my cigars, won't you?"

He was about to toss the cigar into the other boat, but its occupant shook his head.

"Not now," he said. "Thanks, just the same. . . . Let's see, you was askin' me somethin', wasn't you?"

"You said you lived at—at Seven-up. I asked you what that was."

"Ain't been in Nauticook very long, have you?"

"Almost a month."

"And you never heard of Seven-up? Where are you stayin'?"

"At the hotel."

"Um-hm. Yes, yes. I heard there was a fellow with a boat like yours stoppin' at the Ellis cottage, so I took it for granted you was him."

"No, I'm at the Inn."

"That explains it. You wouldn't hear much cheap talk there."

"Why?"

" 'Cause it *is* cheap."

Hazen chuckled. "You think cheapness is against the Inn rules, I take it?"

"Always heard 'twas. You ought to know, though."

"And the—er—what is it?—the Ellis cottage is different, eh?"

"No trouble to hear there. Partitions am so thin you can sit on the front piazza and hear 'em wash dishes in the kitchen."

There was another interval of silence. Extracting remarks from the Heath person was, it seemed to Samuel

Hazen, a very real labor. Having nothing better to do, however, he continued.

"Well, what about Seven-up—and the dog?" he prompted.

"Eh? . . . Oh, Seven-up is what most folks call the shack I live in. My first name is John, but there's a couple of dozen Johns in Nauticook, so, as my middle name is Huyler, they call me 'Hi.' Lorenzo Weeks lives along with me and he's 'Lo.' When the dog joined the pack he, naturally, got into the game."

Hazen thought it over; then he burst out laughing.

"I get you," he said. "Hi, Lo and Jack. Seven-up. Good enough!"

"Um-hm. . . . Say, Mr.—er—Hazen, there's extra lines aboard here. If you'd rather fish than just look on—and talk—you can, you know."

Hazen, who was fond of fishing, accepted the hint and the lines, also a tin pail of bait—mussels, or as his new acquaintance called them, "wrinkles." Heath obligingly broke the shells of the wrinkles with a wooden mallet. The pair fished and smoked. Hazen tried several times to renew the conversation but his efforts met with little encouragement. Apparently John Huyler Heath considered that he had conversed enough for one afternoon.

The fishing lasted for another hour. Then Heath pulled up his lines.

"Tide's turned," he observed. "Haul in. Might as well go now."

Hazen looked about him. The fog was as thick as ever, even thicker if that were possible.

"Go!" he repeated incredulously. "Go where?"

"Home. . . . Which had you rather do; have me give you a little gas and let you follow me in, or come aboard here with me and have my craft tow yours?"

Hazen's answer was prompt. "If it is all the same to you, I'm strong for the second proposition. I usually like to

see what I'm following and just now I can't see twenty feet."

"That's further than you'd need to see; but it's all right; get aboard."

He drew the *Ruth* alongside and Hazen scrambled into the other boat. She was a broad-beamed, battered antique which had originally been a catboat. The mast, however, had been sawed off close to the deck. She was dingy and oily and smelled to high heaven. John Heath motioned to his passenger to sit on the bench bordering the cockpit, while he lengthened and made fast the *Ruth's* towline.

Then he went forward, pulled up the anchor and, returning, lifted the lid of a boxlike erection amidships, disclosing a gasoline engine, an old-fashioned affair as greasy and odorous as the rest of his outfit. Stooping, he seized the rim of the starting wheel and jerked it toward him. A series of snorts and wheezy splutters resulted.

"Doesn't want to start, does it?" volunteered Hazen, nervously watching the operation.

"No, but I do. . . . There! there! Wake up!"

The snorts and coughs became a series of pops and bangs. The boat moved through the water. Her owner settled himself beside the wheel and crossed one rubber-booted leg over the other.

"All right now?" inquired Hazen.

"All right till she stops again."

"What? . . . You mean she stops often?"

"Liable to—and oftener. Reach me that compass box there on the thwart, will you? Thanks."

During the next hour she stopped four times. Her owner seemed to accept these cessations as a matter of course and, which was gratifying to Hazen's peace of mind, she always started again after coaxing. About them the foghorns and whistles shrieked or wailed or groaned. Occasionally Jack, the dog, was called upon to perform his barking

specialty. The wind was steadily rising and the long greasy swells had changed to shorter and choppy waves. There was an occasional whitecap.

John—or Huyler—or Hi—Heath volunteered no remarks. Hazen regarded him with growing interest. He was broad-shouldered, and thickset, his hair—as much of it as could be seen below the sou'wester—brown and shot with gray. His face, except for a short mustache, was clean-shaven and tanned to a deep red. His blue eyes were keen and had the sailor's pucker at their corners. Hazen guessed his age to be somewhere in the late thirties. His replies to his passenger's questions were always crisply curt, although their tone was pleasant enough.

"What is your boat's name?" Hazen asked.

"*Sarepta.*"

"*Sarepta.* . . . That's an odd name. A woman's, isn't it?"

"Um-hm."

"Did you name her for a relative of yours?"

"No— Woman that kept house for me a spell, afore Lorenzo took the job."

"You must have liked her, if you named your boat after her."

"I didn't."

"What? Didn't like her? Well, then, I don't see—"

"Oh, when you get used to Sarepta's ways—the woman's I mean—you could get along with her, after a fashion. That's how I get along with this tub. . . . Sit a little nearer this way, will you, Mr. Hazen? There's shoaler water along here."

Here, so far as the passenger could see, was precisely like there, or anywhere else. He moved, however, as requested. Then he became aware of a new sound in the fog ahead, an irregular tolling, inexpressibly forlorn and doleful. He knew what it must be, the bellbuoy at the entrance of the tortuous

channel leading into Nauticook harbor. He leaned forward, anxiously trying to locate the sound. When he turned to look at the *Sarepta's* skipper the latter was holding the wheel steady with his knees and was refilling his pipe.

The mournful tolling grew louder. For a fleeting instant Hazen caught a shadowy glimpse of the buoy, rocking and clanging in the mist to starboard. There were other sounds now, a menacing grumble, accented by heavy liquid thumps and splashes. The water on both sides of the boat's bow was streaked with foam. There were breakers all about them, they were in the channel.

Samuel Hazen was not a particularly nervous man, but he was nervous now. To find the channel at all seemed to him, under the circumstances, a miracle; to keep in its half mile of windings impossible. Yet John Huyler Heath continued to smoke, and steer with one hand. Jack, the dog, had curled up in the bow and was sleeping peacefully. The roars and grumble and splashes were nearer now and on both sides, yet the breakers themselves were invisible. It was a marvel of blind navigation, and Hazen, in spite of his nervousness, could not help but admire.

"I swear," he muttered, "I don't see how you do it."

"Eh?"

"Oh, nothing. . . . By George! there they are—dead ahead! . . . See! See!"

He pointed. Across their bow was a grayish-white tumult, a jumping, frothing barrier.

"Look out!" cried Hazen, instinctively. "Breakers! . . . See!"

His companion sucked at his pipe. "Um-hm," he observed. "I see. We ain't goin' there, though."

And, apparently, they were not. The *Sarepta's* nose swung off to port. She lifted and bounced and rocked tipsily. For an instant cold wet showers of spray shot over her. Then she moved on and out into smoother water; the froth-

ing barrier was astern now; another moment and it was lost in the fog.

"Whew!" whistled Samuel Hazen. John Heath stooped to scratch a match on the underside of the bench bordering the cockpit.

A quarter of an hour later the *Sarepta* slid alongside a wooden pier, with a flight of steps leading down to the water. Heath seized the rail of the steps and held the boat motionless.

"Here you are, Mr. Hazen," he said.

Hazen looked up at the pier. It was, as much as he could see of it, vaguely familiar—and yet—

"Yes," he agreed, doubtfully, "I do seem to be here, that's a fact. But just where that here may be I'm not so sure. What place is this?"

Heath did not answer. He was busy casting off the *Ruth's* towline. He drew the Hazen boat up to the steps and made her fast there. Heavy steps sounded on the wharf above. A bulky figure peered down at them.

"Hello!" hailed Captain Ben Hopkins. "Here you be, eh? Glad to see you, Mr. Hazen. Your folks was gettin' a little mite scared about you. I told 'em there wasn't nawthin' to worry over. Oh, hello, Hi! That you?"

Heath grunted. "Um-hm," he said. "Say, Ben, you keep gasoline here, don't you?"

"Why, sure we do. Want some, do you?"

"No. Just wondered if you kept it, that's all."

"Course we keep it."

"Um-hm. Well, next time one of your boarders goes out with fog comin' up don't keep it all; let him have a little mite. . . . So long."

The *Sarepta* was moving away from the wharf. Hazen, on his way up the steps, turned and shouted.

"Wait! Wait, Mr. Heath! Don't go yet. I haven't paid you for bringing me in. Wait!"

"Nothin' to pay."

"But—there must be. There's just got to be. You—why, I don't know what might have happened if you hadn't—Wait, I tell you! I must do something. Can't I give you—Oh, *wait!*"

The skipper of the *Sarepta* caught hold of a wharf pile and arrested her progress.

"Well," he drawled, "you might give me that cigar you offered me a spell ago; that is, if you can spare it. . . . Tut, tut! one's a plenty. Much obliged."

"But, I say—"

"All right. So long."

He gave a vigorous shove and the *Sarepta* moved off into the fog, her engine popping and banging. Hazen shouted once more.

"I'm not through with you yet," he called. "I'll be down to see you to-morrow morning. To-morrow morning early. You understand?"

He meant it and he kept his word. But when, at nine o'clock next morning, his car stopped before the Seven-up shanty by the beach, a plump person whom he guessed to be Mr. Lorenzo Weeks answered his knock and his question. No, sir, Hi was not in. He had gone off coddin' at six that morning and would not be back until late afternoon.

Hazen went back to the Inn to find a telegram urging him to return to his New York office at once; an urgent matter of business required his presence. So he took the afternoon train, promising himself that, the following summer, when, as he meant to do, he again vacationed in Nauticook, his first act of that vacation would be to renew acquaintanceship with John Huyler Heath.

The next summer, however, Mrs. Hazen, her daughter, her maid and her husband—to name them in order of importance as rated by her—traveled in Europe. The summer

following that they were at Seal Harbor. The third found them at Bretton Woods.

And so on. A good many years were to elapse before that acquaintanceship was renewed.

CHAPTER II

THE *Sarepta,* having delivered the *Ruth* and her owner at the Inn pier, moved on up the harbor. The harbor was long, narrow and, for the most part shallow, with an occasional sparbuoy marking the edges of the sand flats. John Huyler Heath threaded his way between those buoys, picking up one after the other as easily as if there had been no fog. He could have located them quite as readily in the middle of the night, could have found his way in that harbor if he were blind, for its every twist and curve were etched in his memory. For eight years—and, with very few and rare exceptions, every day of every one of those years—he had gone out to the Razor Bank, where the cod and haddock were wont to feed, had gone there in the morning and returned in the afternoon just as he was returning now. So far as his expectations went, he never bothered himself with the future to any great extent, he expected to follow that same routine until he was too old and feeble to handle a boat. Unless, of course, he should die—drown or be cut off by accident or a fatal illness—before old age came upon him. Of the two alternatives, old age or death, the latter was preferable. His opinion of life was that it was pretty much of a mess. He summed it up in two words: "All nothin'."

When the group at the Sheet Anchor Club, a Nauticook institution of long standing, dating back to the days of square-riggers and deep-sea captains—when his fellow members of that club discussed politics and business and total abstinence and local scandal he listened, but he seldom took part in the argument. It was, the whole of it, all nothin'. When the powwow waxed loud and stormy over some point

of creed or religious belief, he merely smiled and smoked, for creed and theology, too, were all nothin'. When Lorenzo Weeks, who was susceptible to such things, attended a revival meeting and came home suffering agonies of repentance for past sins, and fear of punishment to come, he either walked out in the middle of the lamentations or, if his mood was more patient just then, offered the penitent a cigar and a word or two of cynical advice.

"Keep your hair on, Lo," he counseled. "Those meetin'house pilots don't know any more about it than you do. They're navigatin' by guess and by gosh, same as the rest of us. Look at Jack there. He ain't much of a dog, but he's got sense enough not to worry about the devil except when he's catchin' it for chasin' chickens. All nothin', eh, Jack? So what's the difference?"

Of course, and naturally, John Heath's reputation in Nauticook was, among the pious and respectable, anything but good. He went fishing Sundays, as well as week days. He swore if he felt like it, smoked when he felt like it, and wore the sort of clothes which were the most comfortable. When the minister called—and every new and young parson did call soon after accepting a Nauticook pulpit—he was polite enough but discouragingly nonreceptive. The earnest shepherd who came hoping to rescue this lost black sheep invariably left Seven-up disturbed, baffled and, sometimes, angry.

The Reverend Sampson, who was very young and very earnest indeed, was one of these callers. It was after supper time on Friday evening—prayer-meeting night—and Mr. Sampson had high hopes of persuading Mr. Heath to accompany him to that meeting. When he ventured to suggest it John shook his head.

"Ain't cleaned to-day's fish yet," he said.

"Will it take you very long to clean them?"

"No-o, ain't very many of 'em, worse luck."

"Mr. Weeks here will help you, won't he?"

"Um-hm."

"Then how long will it take?"

"Three-quarters of an hour, maybe."

"Good! That will be plenty of time before the meeting. Why," with a sudden inspiration, "*I* can help, too. I will! Then we can all go."

Heath took his pipe from his pocket.

"Ever clean fish?" he asked.

"Why," with a smile, "not professionally."

"Ever clean 'em any way?"

"Why, yes, once in a while, when I was a boy."

"I used to go to prayer meetin' when I was a boy. Kind of nice to remember things you did when you was a kid, isn't it?"

"Delightful!" This was encouraging; there was a vein of sentiment in this man, after all. "Memories of childhood are precious," gushed Mr. Sampson.

"Um-hm. A spell ago I remembered how I used to like the rye-meal hasty pudding my grandmother made. So I bought some rye meal and had Lo cook a kettleful."

"Yes? . . . Well?"

"Eh? . . . Yes—and it turned out about the worst stuff I ever tasted; I'd grown away from the flavor. If I'd been satisfied to eat from memory I'd have loved it yet."

He appeared to consider the subject closed. Mr. Sampson fidgeted in his chair.

"That is very interesting," he ventured, after a moment, "but really I—I'm afraid I don't catch your meaning, Mr. Heath."

"Don't you? Well, it's about like this: Your fish cleanin' and my prayer meetin' are like that hasty puddin', first-rate rememberings. Better let 'em stay that way, hadn't we?"

The conversation was repeated, of course, and it did not help to improve the Heath reputation. There were many

other yarns of a similar character. John Heath was not exactly unpopular in town; he was scrupulously honest, he paid his debts on the nail and his word was as good as his note, but the conservative element disapproved of him. He was blunt, irreverent and skeptical. He was "different" and difference invites suspicion. Old Deacon Amond Lathrop summed it up when he said, in an unguarded moment during the heat of argument: "Havin' your own notions may sound smart, but I've always found it paid to be orthodox."

John Huyler Heath was a native son of Nauticook, although by the majority he was counted as an outlander. He was born in the village and lived there while a lad, but his father, a Banks fisherman, was lost at sea and the boy and his mother moved away. The accepted story was that they moved to a Maine coast town, but few ever knew the name of that town and those few did not trouble to remember it. Nauticook lost track of Sarah Heath and her son and it was not until years later that the son called himself to its attention.

Then he stepped off the train one day, carrying a shabby canvas and leather valise, nodded to the veteran station agent, who, of course, did not recognize him, and walked down the main street to the Wayfarers' Rest, Nauticook's commercial hotel and the only one open throughout the year. He asked for and was told the price of a room. Without comment he turned toward the door.

"Where you goin'?" demanded astonished Benijah Rogers, the hotel proprietor. "You wanted a room, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've got a room for you. What's the matter with it?"

"Price," said Heath and went out.

He made a few laconic inquiries at the post office and then spent several hours lugging the heavy valise from one door to another. At last he rented a tiny third-story back room

from Mrs. Obed Keeler, whose husband was a lobster man. The location of the room was high, but its price was low. He left his valise on the floor by the bed and descended the stairs.

"Where are you goin' now?" his landlady asked.

"Out."

Out he went, bought a small tin of corned beef and a half pound of crackers at the grocery store and sat on a stone wall in Smalley's field, looking out over the harbor and eating his luncheon. Below him was Joshua Burgess's fish shanty and old Joshua, who was what Nauticook calls a "codder," was just bringing his catboat up to the landing. The meal eaten, Heath tossed the empty can over the wall and walked down to the shanty. Josh was pitchforking his catch from the boat to beach. He looked up and saw the stranger approaching.

"Hello!" hailed Joshua, who was a sociable soul.

"Hello!"

"Nice day, for this time of year."

"Um-hm."

This rather discouraging beginning shut off the Burgess conversational tap for the moment. He went into the shanty and came out with a cleaning knife and a board. Sitting on the edge of the small wharf, he proceeded to clean his fish. Heath watched him for a moment, then he, too, went into the shanty, emerging with another knife.

"What you cal'latin' to do with that knife?" demanded Burgess.

"Clean."

Which, without waiting for permission or remonstrance, he proceeded to do with skill and dispatch.

"Humph!" grunted Joshua. "You've cleaned fish afore, ain't you?"

"Um-hm."

It happened that Joshua's assistant, his hired man who

usually went with him on his codding trips, had resigned his position and moved to Ostable. For three days Burgess had fished and cleaned and iced alone and he disliked loneliness. He watched this volunteer aide for a while and then observed, "You're pretty smart at that job, I must say. You're a stranger here, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Thought I'd never seen you afore. Stoppin' in town a spell?"

"Hope so."

"Eh? What d'you mean—hope so?"

"Hope I can stop."

"Why can't you, if you want to?"

"Can't unless I get a job."

There was more of this, a great deal more, but when John Huyler Heath went back to his room at the Keelers' he had engaged to go out codding the following morning with Joshua Burgess.

"I'm just takin' you on trial, you understand that," cautioned Josh. "If you make good I'll pay you twelve dollars a week. If you don't make good—why, that'll be all there is to it."

"All right."

He made good, and he worked for and with Josh Burgess until the latter died. During the latter part of this association he was virtually a partner in the fishing business and was earning sometimes as much as thirty-five dollars a week, the greater part of which he saved. When Burgess died he bought the boat and shanty, partly with cash and partly with his note, and went "boat fishing" alone. When the note came due it was paid. Later on he built, on the top of the low sand bluff at the rear of the shanty, a little five-room house, built it with his own hands. Nauticook watched that dwelling grow, watched it at first with amusement and then with grudging admiration. John Huyler

Heath was no "jackleg" carpenter; he was, so his work demonstrated, a very capable one. He furnished it with secondhand furniture, selecting each item with care, apparently paying little attention to the condition the piece was in, for some were almost total wrecks rescued from attics and barn lofts. Nauticook chuckled when those purchases were made, but not when it saw what he made of them.

"Well!" exclaimed one casual observer, as he watched the refinishing of a chair, "say, that's goin' to be mighty pretty when you're done with it. You hadn't ought to waste your time coddin', Hi; you ought to do cabinetmakin'. Did you ever learn the trade?"

"Um-hm," absently.

"Oh!" with a marked increase of interest, "you did, eh? I didn't know that. Where did you learn it?"

Hi looked up and then down again.

"Of a cabinetmaker," he said. Questions dealing with his past life, where he had been and what he had done during his years of absence from Nauticook, he never answered, nor did he drop so much as a hint concerning those years. Of course there were plenty of surmises, one of which was that he had been in state's prison and had learned cabinetmaking there. Even when that surmise was suggested to him, by an inebriated loafer the evening before the Fourth of July, he did not trouble to deny it.

"Fellow that has a chance to go to jail might learn a lot there, I shouldn't wonder, Bill," he said.

"Yeh," hilariously, "I guess likely. Trouble is most of us —mind you I say *most* of us—ain't ever had that chance."

"Well, don't be discouraged; you've got a good start."

When the little house was finished and furnished he transferred his belongings from the garret room at Mrs. Keeler's. Then he hired Sarepta Blake, a widow, as cook, housekeeper and laundress. This arrangement ended in a month. Sarepta declared she couldn't stand it no longer and

had resigned. When this statement was repeated to her late employer—as of course it immediately was—he smiled.

"Sarepta's contented now, isn't she?" he asked.

"Says she is."

"That's good; so am I."

He hired Lorenzo Weeks, who had formerly cooked aboard a coaster, in her place. Lorenzo was forty-one and single.

"You and me ought to get along together, Mr. Heath," declared Weeks, optimistically. "I ain't never married and, so far as I know, you ain't neither."

Heath wheeled, to stare at him with frowning intentness. "What's that?" he asked sharply. "So far as you know—what do you mean?"

"Eh? Why, I—I just said that, so far as I knew, you hadn't never married any more'n I had."

"Any *more* than you had?"

"Well, I—I mean—"

"You haven't married at all, have you?"

"No! What sort of talk— No, course I ain't!"

The frown disappeared. Heath turned away. "Then why worry?" he grunted.

"I *ain't* worried. . . . Honest, Mr. Heath, I—I don't know what you're talkin' about."

This was the first of many occasions during their long association when the bewildered Lorenzo felt obliged to repeat that confession. Mr. Weeks liked to talk very much and John Heath, always taciturn, had periods when, apparently, he did not wish to talk at all. Then, if his man of all work questioned him, he was wont to, as Lorenzo described it, snarl the talk up till a fellow forgot which end he started with. This was always the case when reference was made to the Heath family history, or, more specially, to the history of John Huyler Heath. *That* he would never mention nor permit to be mentioned.

So "Hi" "Lo" and, later Jack—the dog—lived together in the little house and that house became known as "Seven-up." Nauticook by this time was taking John Heath for granted, as a queer but unimportant part of itself. It ceased to wonder where he had come from or why. Miss Clara Simms, the village librarian, who, being surrounded by literature every day, was of a romantic turn of mind, vowed she was sure the strange creature had a story if he would only tell it. "He gets books from the library here," said Miss Simms, "and—I know it sounds almost too ridiculous to believe—some are books of poetry. A boat fisherman reading poetry! Oh, there's a secret mystery gnawing at that man's heart. I only wish I knew what it was."

This diagnosis of the Heath chest complaint was widely quoted and laughed over, for the primly genteel Miss Simms and the precise elegance of manner with which she scattered her flowers of rhetoric were never-failing joys in Nauticook. Thereafter, when the loafers on the post office platform spied Hi Heath approaching along the sidewalk, one of them was certain to announce: "Hey, fellows, here comes Clara's heart gnawer." A sure-fire joke of that kind is a convenient item for stock.

Nevertheless in this particular instance Miss Simms was right. There was a secret hidden in the soul of John Huyler Heath. He had deposited it there when he left Fox Harbor, the Maine coast town where he and his mother had gone after leaving Nauticook, where she had died some years later, and where he had confidently expected to live out his life. No one in Nauticook knew it except he, no one should ever know it—from him, at least. It was a horror to be stamped under foot, buried, like any other dead and dreadful thing. Even in that Maine town it must be forgotten by now; or so he hoped. In all probability every one had forgotten it save John Heath himself and two others—provided those others, one or both, were still living. Whether or not

they still lived he did not know; he tried to persuade himself that he did not care.

When a young man of twenty-two, he had fallen in love with Ella Barbour whose father was the Congregational minister in Fox Harbor. Ella was pretty, vivacious, fond of a good time and a social favorite. She liked the boys and the boys, a good many of them, liked her. John Heath, working hard at his trade of cabinetmaking in the furniture store, was one who liked her very much indeed. The townspeople estimated him as an earnest ambitious youth, steady enough and honest, but quiet and rather peculiar; by no means the sort of fellow likely to stand high in the favor of a pretty bit of fluff like Ella Barbour. Why she selected him rather than one of a half-dozen others no one could understand. He was not the Reverend Samuel Barbour's selection, although the minister was far from being a dictatorial parent and if Ella had announced that she intended to marry John, in the end he would have yielded and she would have had her own way, as she always had had it.

Therefore when the young couple, without saying a word to any one, took the train to Boston and were married there before a justice of the peace, Fox Harbor was greatly surprised. It seemed such a senseless, causeless procedure. Mr. Barbour was greatly shaken, but he welcomed his daughter and her husband upon their return, and made the best of it. Ella, when asked why she had eloped instead of being married at home in the regular way, merely laughed. "Oh, just for fun," she said. "It was exciting. I was so sick of this pokey old town and doing exactly what every one expected me to do. And what of it, anyway? I have the right to live my own life as I please, haven't I? I intend to, you may be sure of that."

For a time the young couple lived at the parsonage. Then the Reverend Samuel died suddenly of a heart attack. Ella was hysterical and frantic with grief for a week after the

funeral. She went to New York to visit a married friend, a girl whom she had known when at boarding school in Bridgewater. She left, announcing that she would be back in ten days. It was more than a month before she did return.

Meanwhile John Heath had been busy. He rented a small house on Seaview Street, superintended the moving of his own and his late father-in-law's household goods to that house, worked as hard as ever in the furniture store—there was a rumor that he might be taken into partnership at the end of the year—and spent his lonely evenings painting, paper hanging, carpet laying and scrubbing. When, at last, his wife came home the new house was ready for her. What she said when she saw it—whether she was pleased or disappointed—no one but she and her husband knew and he, you may be sure, never told. The habit of saying as little as possible was growing upon him.

For two more years the Heaths lived in that house. To all outward appearances they were happy. True, Ella was at home very little during the day and almost never in the evening if she could help it. She belonged to every local society and club to which she was eligible for membership and her name was on the roster of goodness knew how many committees. She was clever in amateur dramatics, sang a little, and loved cards and dancing. On afternoons when there were no committee meetings or rehearsals she went out driving or calling. Her husband had bought a horse and buggy—how he could afford either to buy or maintain them most of their acquaintances vowed they could *not* see—and the horse was seldom in the barn. She dressed remarkably well, too, which was another subject of curious comment. At practically every dance or party in Fox Harbor or neighboring towns the Heaths were present, Mrs. Heath always radiant, vivacious and popular, particularly with the men, John Heath usually sitting by himself in a corner, quiet, seeking no society, speaking only when spoken to, watching

his wife with adoring eyes. Apparently he was happy and contented, finding his pleasure in her enjoyment.

When he first came to Fox Harbor he had been a rather rough, uncouth boy, speaking with a marked Down-East twang. Since his marriage—yes, ever since the beginning of his courtship of the minister's daughter—he had steadily improved in language and manner. He read a great deal; having many lonely evenings and Sunday afternoons in which to do so. He still dropped his *g's* and his accent still retained traces of the twang, but he had changed greatly—for the better, so Fox Harbor declared.

"I'll say this for Ella Heath," confided a feminine friend of the family to her husband, "she has made a different man out of John. He was always a good fellow, and a nice-looking one—I imagine it was his good looks that caught Ella in the beginning—but he certainly never was what you might call a parlor ornament. Now he is really quite presentable. She sees to that; did you hear her snap him up last night when he said 'done' instead of 'did'? He didn't say it again the whole evening."

The husband shrugged. "I'll bet he didn't! That, or very much else. Snapping John up is the easiest thing Ella does. I wouldn't stand it, most men wouldn't, but he just wags his tail and asks for more. Did you notice the new bracelet she was wearing? Paying for that will keep his nose to the grindstone for one while."

And then Ralph Condon came to Fox Harbor. Mr. Condon was dashing, handsome and with money to spend. He was—or had been—the traveling representative of an Attleboro, Mass., jewelry house, but having been hurt in a railway accident the previous fall and in the hospital in consequence, was now, as he expressed it, getting his strength back. His sojourn in Fox Harbor was planned to be but a fortnight. In August, however, he was still there.

The Heaths first met him at the Odd Fellows' Ball on the

eve of the Fourth of July. He and Mrs. Heath danced together several times. The following evening they met again during the exhibition of fireworks in Town Hall Square. On Sunday he dined with them. John invited him, at Ella's suggestion. Thereafter he dined and called there frequently.

By the end of that month people were beginning to talk. By mid-August the talks were emphasized by head-shakings. There were whispered ominous prophecies. What was the matter with John Heath? Was the wool pulled over his eyes by his wife so thick as to blind him altogether? Or was he just a plain fool? This thing was getting to be an open scandal. If it kept on—

On a day in the third week of the month Heath's employer sent him to Boston on business. He suggested to Ella that she accompany him, as he was to be away several days. He had never before known her to decline such an invitation, but she declined this one. She didn't feel like going, she said. So unsuspecting, blind John Heath went alone.

He wrote his wife every day of his absence, he always did that. She did not write him, but he did not expect her to do so. He returned on a Saturday evening, after being gone six days, and found his home dark and its doors locked. He climbed in through a window and, having lighted a lamp, saw a note addressed to him lying on the dining-room table. He was not greatly surprised by that. She had, probably, gone out for the evening and left him to get his own supper. Well, there was nothing unusual in that either.

Then he read the note.

She had gone away. She was sick to death of living in a dead and alive place like Fox Harbor, sick of washing dishes, sick of being poor, sick of it all. She had a chance to see a little of the world and she was going to see it. Their marriage was a mistake, she knew when she married him that they were not suited for each other, but he had coaxed her into it, and she had been sorry ever since. Perhaps he had

been sorry, too; if so he could be glad now, for it was ended and done with and there was no use trying to find her and bring her back, because she would never come. She had rather die than live the way she had been living.

All that night and the following day and night John Heath spent alone in that house. On Monday morning George Collins, one of Fox Harbor's younger members of the legal profession, was surprised, when he came down to his office at nine o'clock, to find a man standing by the door. He was still more surprised when he recognized that man.

"Why, hello, John!" he exclaimed. "What brings you—" And then, as he saw his visitor's face, he added sharply, "Good heavens, man, what is the matter?"

Heath motioned toward the door. "Go inside," he ordered.

They went into the office and Collins closed the door. John sat down in a chair. Collins gazed at him.

"Why—why, what is it?" he demanded, in growing alarm. "You look—are you sick?"

"No."

"Then—"

His caller interrupted. "Don't ask questions. Listen. I want you to sell me out as quick as you can."

"Sell you out? Sell you out of what?"

"Everything. Horse and team, furniture—all I've got in town here. I want you to do it and do it as quick as you can. I'm goin' away."

"But—"

"No buts. If I sign papers, power of attorney or whatever they are, turnin' my affairs over to you, you can sell me out, pay up my bills and send me whatever is left, or my half of it. You can do that, can't you?"

"Why—why, yes, I suppose I can."

"All right; then do it. Get the papers ready now. I'm takin' the eleven o'clock train."

Collins caught his breath. "Look here, John," he protested,

"you can't—why, you must not. You see—well, does your wife—"

John Heath laughed. It was a queer laugh and it shocked the lawyer, shocked and frightened him. The answer to the question was even more shocking.

"My wife isn't interested. She's gone already."

Collins sprang to his feet. "Gone!" he cried. "What do you mean? Gone where?"

"How do I know? Ask the man she's gone with. . . . Oh, for God's sake, shut up, will you! Shut up and listen!"

For more than an hour the pair were together in that office. Other clients came, clients with appointments, but they were refused admittance. Collins listened, exclaimed, swore and expostulated. He would have advised, but his counsel was peremptorily brushed aside. John Heath's mind was made up. He absolutely rejected any suggestion that the runaway couple be traced or followed. He did not wish to know where they had gone. He was going himself and at once and he seemed to have no more knowledge of, or interest in, his own destination than in theirs. The one point upon which he was firmly insistent was that all his property, real and personal—not that inherited from the Reverend Samuel but his own—be sold immediately for what it would bring and that half of the proceeds, after all debts were paid, was to be set aside and kept, in case his wife should claim it. His own half he would send for sometime or other.

"But you're crazy, John," protested Collins. "She isn't entitled to a cent. She has deserted you. You can get a divorce, if you want one. I'll help you get it. Why, she is a—"

Heath held up his hand. "There, there," he said, "Cut that out. I don't want any divorce. I don't want anything but my half of what there is left when things are squared up. Judgin' by some of the bills I found in her desk there at home, that half won't be much. Do as I tell you to. Oh, yes,

of course I expect you to take your own pay out of my half before you send it. I'll write you by and by, probably, and tell you where I am. If there's any more papers to sign you can send 'em there and I'll get 'em back to you."

"But, John, you can't clear out this way, for good and all. You have a lot of friends here."

"You mean I had."

"Those that are worth a darn will be your friends just the same. Nobody is going to blame you for this damnable business. They'll all be sorry for you."

Heath rose from the chair. "They needn't be. The sooner they forget me the better."

He took the eleven o'clock train. Collins never saw him again. After the necessary legal preliminaries, he sold, at auction and by private sale, the contents of the house and barn on Seaview Street. The proceeds, after the debts were paid, amounted to very little. Ella Heath's personal bills—bills she had never let her husband see—were many.

Some three months after the sale he received a brief note from John Heath, written from an address in Boston. "If there's anything left send it to me here," was all the note contained. Collins sent the small check and wrote a long letter, begging for information concerning his client and former friend, his plans and his present whereabouts. This letter was not answered. The lawyer inserted advertisements in Boston and New York papers stating that, if Mrs. John Huyler Heath, née Ella Barbour, would communicate with him she would learn something to her pecuniary advantage. After a time an attorney in Chicago wrote that he was Mrs. Heath's legal representative and enclosed papers to prove it. Collins sent a check for the other half of the sale's proceeds to this man and receipt was acknowledged. That ended the matter. Fox Harbor, a part of it, discussed the affairs of John and Ella Heath and the dashing Mr. Condon for a few weeks and then forgot them.

Meanwhile John was trying to forget, adopting most of the stereotyped recipes for forgetfulness. From Fox Harbor he went to Portland. There he did nothing at first, except wander about the streets. Then he applied for, and obtained, a job in a desk factory. He worked in that factory until the next Saturday night. Then, with his week's wages in his pocket, he started on another tour of the streets, stopping at various saloons along the route. He did not go back to the factory on Monday.

From Portland he went to Boston. In Boston, on one of the wharves, he met an old friend of his father's, skipper of a Gloucester-owned mackerel schooner. This man, whose name was Cobb, spent the evening with him along the water front and, a little after midnight, assisted his young acquaintance aboard the schooner and gave him a berth there. Next day he suggested that Heath go with him on the fishing cruise. John accepted; it was somewhere to go and something to do.

He remained aboard that schooner, as one of its crew, for more than a year. While at sea life was endurable; he loved salt water and the hard routine kept mind and body occupied. In port, however, he never joined his shipmates in the nightly rough and tough round of what they called having a good time. He went away by himself and, at the sailing hour, appeared again, heavy-eyed and haggard, but sober enough to pick up his work where he had left it.

When he tired of mackereling he joined another Gloucester schooner making regular trips to the Banks for cod. This life was rougher and more severe than the other, but there was adventure in it and he liked it better. There were two years of this. Former acquaintances in Fox Harbor would scarcely have recognized him had they met him now. He was tanned and weather-beaten, swarthy as an Indian, and as hard and supple as hickory. His old careless habits of

speech and accent were habitual with him once more. He was a typical "Banker."

In the fall of the fourth year he happened to pick up in a reading room of the Gloucester Seamen's Friend Society, a weekly periodical which printed society news of various summer resorts. He was not particularly interested, except in the pictures, reproductions of photographs. One of these showed the long stretch of Nauticook harbor with the village of Nauticook, or a portion of it, in the foreground.

He remembered Nauticook well. He had spent his boyhood there and there, as he remembered it, he had been happy. He was anything but happy now. He had not taken a drink since coming ashore, had declined all invitations to do so. There was no particular reason for those refusals; his abstinence was merely a whim. One of his mates had taunted him with not being able to keep off the stuff and he, conscious of the truth behind the taunt, had determined to test his will power. For two days he had fought temptation; he was still fighting it, but the fight was a hard one and he was morose and gloomy—even more gloomy than usual.

The picture of Nauticook gave him an odd thrill. He was almost homesick. Moreover the past forty-eight hours of clear-headedness had set him thinking. He was weary of the life he was leading, bored with the company of his tough associates, eager to welcome any sort of change. Nauticook and its memories appealed to him. He wanted to see the place again, he wanted—or thought he did—to spend a while there and see if he liked it, as he had loved it when a youngster.

Well, why not? He had a little money in the savings bank, not what he might have had if he had really ever set himself to save, but a few hundred dollars, nevertheless. He drew a small part of this sum, went back to his boarding house, packed his valise and took the train for Boston that

afternoon. The following morning he alighted at the Nauticook station.

He was still there. The happiness he had come to seek he had not found, of course, but life was as endurable in that neighborhood as anywhere else, perhaps more so—for him. Life everywhere was "all nothin'."

This was John Huyler Heath's "secret mystery." Miss Clara Simms was, you see, not such a bad diagnostician.

CHAPTER III

MR. LORENZO WEEKS was sitting in the kitchen of Seven-up, a pan of potatoes between his knees, a paring knife in his right hand, a pipe in his mouth, and a small book—or booklet—propped open on the table before him. He was a short, fat man, with a round face, a fleshy nose and small blue eyes with sandy lashes. His round head was covered with curly, grayish-red hair, except at the crown where there was a shiny bald spot about the size of a small saucer. From the tangle of curls surrounding it that bald spot bulged, nude and conspicuous, like a sand dune rising from a thicket of scrub pine. It was as symmetrical as a tonsure and, for that matter, Mr. Weeks' head and figure resembled those of the convivial monk in a painting. Dress him in a cowled robe, instead of the black shirt, ancient waistcoat and overalls he was wearing, gird his ample equator with a rope and replace his turned-down fisherman's boots with sandals, and he could have posed for the portrait of Friar Tuck.

Not that he had ever heard of Friar Tuck or, if he had, would have in the least approved of that jovial cleric. The resemblance between the two was outward merely. Friar Tuck was, according to the Robin Hood tales, a person of free and easy conscience whose enjoyment of the fleshpots was unhampered by the conviction that he was a sinner.

Lorenzo Weeks knew only too well that he was a sinner. Each revival meeting he attended—and he made it a point to attend every one held in Nauticook, whether at the Baptist or Methodist churches or the Come-Outer Bethel—made

that knowledge more certain. He came home from those meetings suffering agonies of contrition.

"I declare to man, Hi," he wailed, in a candid moment, "I'm gettin' desperate. I don't believe there ever was a human so lost in sin as I be. Why, I never began to realize how many kinds of sin there was till lately. Never began to realize it, I never. Seems as if about everything I ever done from the time I was born up to now was wicked. Every new preacher that comes to this town is all loaded with a fresh list of sins and every last one fits onto me as if 'twas cut to measure. They keep hollerin' 'Repent, repent!' Well, I do repent, don't I?"

"Sounds so."

"Yes, but it don't seem to get me nowhere. The more sins I repent of the more there is ahead of me. The feller they had there to-night was hollerin' about the sin of gluttony. Said that a body who enjoyed his vittles was set on a vain thing. Nice news, that is, to have sprung on you—and right after supper, too. Oh, you needn't laugh! Suppose you'd just found out that all your life long you'd been set on a vain thing and never knew it. How would *you* feel?"

"Like standin' up, probably. There, there, Lo! don't worry. Lay off eatin' for a spell, if you think it'll ease your conscience."

"But, consarn it, I *like* to eat: I never knew that there was anything sinful in eatin'. And from now on every square meal I stow away will taste wicked to me. Just my luck! I wisht I hadn't gone to that meetin'."

He continued to eat as heartily, however, and to repent between meals, apparently finding pleasure in both exercises. The booklet which he was reading now, as he sat in the kitchen with the pan of potatoes between his knees, had been sent to him by mail. It was entitled, "The Tobacco Evil, or the Smoker on the Witness Stand." Lorenzo was

reading and trying to peel potatoes at the same time, a difficult feat to perform. As he peeled and read he pulled steadily at his pipe. Occasionally he groaned aloud.

From the beach below the cottage came the sound of shrill barking. Mr. Weeks was too engrossed in his reading to hear or heed it. The barks drew nearer. There was a scratching at the door. Lorenzo looked up.

"Eh?" he ejaculated. Then, placing the pan on the table, he went to the door and opened it. The fuzzy dog jumped about his knees.

"Shut up, Jack!" he ordered. Leaning out in the fog he shouted, "That you, Hi?"

There was no answer, so Lorenzo took a floppy cap from the nail by the door, pulled it sideways on his head, with the brim over one ear, and hastened down the slope to the fish shanty and the little pier. The *Sarepta* was drawn up beside the pier and John Heath, pitchfork in hand, was tossing his catch from the boat to the planking. Weeks panted alongside.

"That you, Hi?" he repeated. . . . "Say, why don't you say somethin'? 'Tis you, ain't it?"

Heath said something then.

"No," he replied, calmly.

"Eh? . . . Why, 'tis too! I can see you."

"Can you? Then I guess it must be."

The last cod was pitched to the wharf and Heath, climbing after it, walked briskly to the shanty. Lorenzo, muttering and shaking his head, plodded after him. They brought from the building two empty barrels, a box containing cakes of ice, cleaning knives, a hatchet and several pieces of burlap. Heath, squatting by the edge of the wharf, proceeded to clean the fish. The cook chopped the ice with the hatchet. As the cod and haddock were cleaned they were placed in the barrels, the cracked ice scattered over and between them. Jack—or Nuisance, he answered to either name—sat down,

with lolling tongue and an air of boredom, to superintend the operation.

They worked in silence, a silence habitual on the part of Heath, but decidedly unusual on that of his assistant. And, which was still more unusual, when the silence was broken it was the former who broke it.

"Got somethin' on your mind, haven't you, Lo?" he suggested, with a smile.

"Eh? . . . Well, yes, I have—and no wonder!"

"Amount to much, does it?"

"It's you, Hi Heath. That what 'tis."

"Oh; then it doesn't."

Apparently he had lost interest, for he asked no more questions, but busied himself with fitting a section of burlap over the head of one of the barrels. Lorenzo's impatience broke out once more.

"I vow to mercy," he snorted, "there's times when I believe your brains are softenin' up."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, I do. If you ain't crazy, you're next door to it. Such loony talk I nor nobody else ever heard. I come down here and see you heavin' out codfish—see you as plain as ever I see anybody in my life—and I say 'Is that you, Hi?' and you don't say yes, you say no. Now if you ain't crazy what did you say that for? You knew I could see 'twas you, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then why in the nation—"

"Why did you ask, if you could see for yourself?"

"Eh? . . . Why—why, just to be sociable. Just to—to make talk, same as anybody would."

"Well, look at all the talk my sayin' no has made already. . . . There, there, roll that other barrel up to the shanty."

The heavy barrels were rolled to the shore end of the pier, where the express wagon would call for them later on.

They were to be shipped to the wholesale dealers in Boston by night freight. Leaving his assistant to affix the necessary tags, Heath, accompanied by the dog, walked on up to the house. When Lorenzo reached there he was in his bedroom, washing up and changing his clothes.

Mr. Weeks doffed his fishy overalls, performed hasty ablutions at the kitchen sink, and sat down to finish his potato paring and reading.

An hour or so later, when Heath came out into the combined kitchen, living and dining room, supper was ready. The pair took chairs opposite each other at the table. Heath divided the fried liver and fried potatoes on the platter before him, handed his companion a well-filled plate, and began to eat. Mr. Weeks poured the coffee, pushed the bread plate toward the middle of the table, and also ate. And, as always, while eating he talked.

"What do you cal'late I got in to-day's noon's mail, Hi?" he asked.

"Give it up. A valentine?"

"Valentine! In August? Why don't you ask me if I got a Christmas card?"

"Did you?"

"*Did* I? Now that *is* a sensible question!"

"Well, you asked me why I didn't ask it. Anything to oblige. What shall I ask next?"

"I don't want you to ask nothin'. I set out to tell you somethin', if you'd only listen. You've got one of your contrary fits to-night and, I declare to man, I—I'm gettin' sick of 'em. I poke around this house all day long, not a livin' soul to open my mouth to, not even the dog—you take him out coddin'—and—and—"

This outburst was interrupted by a violent bit of strangling. His employer rose, came around the table, and patted him on the back.

"Easy, Lo," he cautioned. "Easy. Better wait till your

pipes are clear afore you let off steam. Some of these days you'll blow up. There, there! take a drink of water."

Lorenzo drank from the proffered tumbler, coughed several times and regarded his rescuer with watery eyes.

"I don't care how soon I blow up," he gasped, desperately. "No, nor you wouldn't neither. You'd be glad to get rid of me."

"Guess not. Be dull as a dead calm around here without you. There, there! What was it you wanted to tell me?"

Mr. Weeks wiped his eyes and forehead with his shirt sleeve.

"I was cal'latin' to tell you what I got in the noon mail," he muttered, his grievance still rankling; "but, so long's you ain't interested—"

"I am. I'm tremblin' all over. What did you get?"

"I got another one of them tracts. No name on it, no more'n there was on the others. I'd like to know who keeps sendin' me them things. *I* don't want 'em."

"What was it this time?"

"'Tobacker Evil' was the name of it. Say, Hi, I never knew afore 'twas wicked to smoke."

"Live and learn."

"But I don't want to learn no more. What do you suppose that tract thing says! Says that a feller who smokes tobacker smells like a savage. I don't smell like no savage, do I, Hi?"

"Can't say. I never smelled one."

"Well, I don't, anyhow. I've smoked ever since I was ten year old. There ain't nothin' against smokin' in Scriptur', is there? I get solid comfort out a pipe."

"Well, if I was you I'd stay comfortable."

"How can I, now that I know it's a sin? Every time I light up from now on I'll sniff brimstone. Them tracts keep comin' once a month, regular as the almanac. Last month's was about profane swearin'. Well, I don't hardly

never swear, or I thought I didn't, but that darned tract said thinkin' profanity was just as bad as sayin' it. How you goin' to stop thinkin'—quick enough to do any good, I mean? Who *do* you suppose keeps sendin' 'em to me, Hi?"

"Somebody that is tryin' to keep you happy, probably."

"Happy! I wisht I had the chance to make him happy with a punch in the nose. . . . Got any tobacker to spare? I've run out."

Heath handed over a paper packet of cut plug and watched, with an amused smile, as the aggrieved sinner filled and lighted the ancient pipe.

"All nothin', Lo," he observed, rising from the table. "All nothin'."

"Huh! That's what you always say. I presume likely them tracts are all nothin', too. Eh?"

"Would be to me. I wouldn't read 'em."

"How can I tell what's in 'em if I don't read 'em? Now I got to wash dishes. I wisht somebody would get out a tract callin' dishwashin' a sin. They won't, though. That's the kind of job that's just mean enough to be righteous."

He washed the dishes at the sink, and Heath wiped them. Jack, having emptied a liberal plateful of scraps, curled up in a chair for a nap.

"Goin' up to the club to-night, are you?" asked Lorenzo.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Don't feel like it."

"What be you goin' to do? Set all alone here the whole evenin' long?"

"Guess so."

Mr. Weeks shook his head.

"You *have* got one of your off streaks, and that's a fact," he declared. "I could tell it the minute I see you down

there to the wharf. Aw, come on, Hi! Why don't you walk along up street with me far's the club?"

"Where are you goin'?"

Lorenzo seemed a trifle embarrassed.

"Oh, I didn't know but I'd drop in at the Bethel about eight or so," he said. "Seems they're havin' a sort of—er—what you might call a special meetin' there to-night. That new minister they've got fillin' in wants to get acquainted with his congregation."

"Thought you was a Methodist."

"Well, I am. I've been a Methodist now for most two year. I was a Baptist afore that."

"Then what are you doin' at Come-Outer congregation meetin'?"

Mr. Weeks' feet seemed to trouble him; he stood first on one and then on the other, looking down at both of them as he did so.

"I ain't figgerin' to do nothin', as I know of," he muttered. "I thought maybe I'd just stop in a minute, bein' as they asked me to."

"Who asked you?"

"Oh, just some of 'em that belong."

"Which ones?"

"How do *I* know?" irritably. "A body'd think I'd been hauled up in court and you was one of them lawyers pickin' me to pieces. Does it make any difference to you who asked me to that meetin'?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, then! . . . What do you want to know for?"

"Seems as if somebody ought to know. You don't."

"Course I know! Think I'm such a fool as all that comes to?"

"I was only takin' your word for it."

"Takin' my word! If you ain't— Here! Hold on, Hi; don't go off mad. I'd just as soon tell you. No rea-

son why I shouldn't. 'Twas Huldy Bascom, seems to me 'twas. Yes, 'twas Huldy asked me; I remember now."

"O-oh!"

There was a significance in this monosyllable which Mr. Weeks seemed to find especially irritating. His round face flamed.

"What do you mean by talkin' that way?" he demanded, shrilly.

"Eh? . . . What way?"

"Why, the way you talked then."

"Didn't talk anything but 'oh.'"

"Yeah! And how did you talk it? There ain't no harm in Huldy Bascom's askin' me to church sociable, is there?"

"Maybe not."

"Maybe! . . . I—I declare if you ain't enough to—*Now* what are you sayin' to yourself?"

"I wasn't sayin' anything. I was just thinkin'."

"You ain't got no business to think. Think it out loud. What was it? You tell me."

"I was thinkin' you ought to be careful, Lo."

"Careful! Careful of what?"

"Women. They're on your sin list, ain't they? They ought to be."

"My salvation's mercy! . . . How old do you cal'late I be? And how old is Huldy Bascom, for thunder sakes?"

"About your age, isn't she?"

"Well, my crimus! I never—"

"Steady, Lo! Haven't forgot your profane swearin' tract so soon, I hope."

Weeks gave it up in despair. He stamped into his bedroom and banged the door behind him. Heath grinned, picked up the Boston paper and sat down in the rocker to read. When Lorenzo reappeared he was still reading.

"I'm goin' now," announced the cook. "Hadn't you better come along—far's the club, I mean?"

"No."

"Do you good. You're down in the doldrums this evenin', anybody can tell that. . . . Well, all right. I'll stop in at the post office and fetch the to-night's mail, if there is any. Anything else you want to say?"

"Just 'Careful, Lo,' that's all."

The outside door closed with a vindictive slam. Heath took from his pocket one of the cigars Mr. Samuel Hazen had given him that afternoon, lighted it, and resumed his reading.

He read for another half hour. Then he threw down the paper, rose, and began pacing up and down the room, his hands in his pockets. Jack opened his eyes and looked expectant, but, receiving no encouragement, curled up again. His master walked to a window, pulled aside the shade and peered out. He could see little or nothing, the night was black and thick. The wind whistled about the corner of the house and tossed a sprinkle of rain against the pane. Out at sea the foghorns wailed and sighed.

He turned away from the window and looked about the room. It was a rough and ready little room but rather cozy, on the whole. The walls were of boards, unpainted, but browned by time and smoke, and there were calendars and pictured advertisements tacked here and there. The cookstove was in the corner beside the sink, and in the corner diagonally opposite was the flight of stairs leading to the unfurnished spare bedroom—it had never been occupied since the house was built—and the small garret adjoining it. The dining table, two rockers, two wooden chairs and a chest of drawers were the furniture. The floor was partially covered by three hooked rugs. In the wall on the left, as one entered the front door, were the two doors leading to his, Heath's, bedroom and that occupied by Weeks. There was a third door, in that back wall, which led to the woodshed.

The chairs, the table and the chest of drawers were antiques. John Huyler Heath would not have called them that. Neither would the majority of his fellow townsmen, for the mania for collecting early American furnishings had not yet reached Nauticook. It was on its way, and wise and foreseeing buyers were picking up choice bits at low prices, but the fever was still in its incipient stages and there were few symptoms of the epidemic which has since raged. Heath, if asked to describe his household goods, would have called them "old junk." Nauticook in general would have agreed with him. They were good specimens of junk, however, and it was surprising how well they looked after he had repaired and refinished them. The rugs were gay and bright, but old-fashioned and queer. He had bought them at the sale of Aunt Samantha Bearse's effects after the old woman's death. Aunt Samantha, who lived to be eighty-nine, had always said that the rugs were made by her grandmother when she—the grandmother—was a girl. Heath had paid two dollars for the three and Nauticook considered his paying anything at all a good joke. No one else would have accepted them as gifts.

When they rallied him on his "bargains" Hi Heath merely grinned. It is doubtful if he, himself, was conscious of any compelling reason for his purchase of rugs or furniture, other than that they were cheap and he liked them. The second reason was sufficiently satisfactory, so far as he was concerned. Old things, good old things, with their old associations, appealed to him more than new ones. He did not know exactly why, but they did. He liked them, and the fact that the majority did not share his liking, made no difference whatever to him.

Just now, however, as he paced moodily up and down the room, he did not like anything in it. Lorenzo Weeks was correct when he declared that his employer was having one of his "off streaks" and was down in the doldrums.

He was—away down. The fishing was as good as usual at this time of year; he owed no one anything; his account in the savings bank was in a more satisfactory condition than it had ever before been; his health was perfect. Ordinarily at this hour, he would have been lounging in the room of the Sheet Anchor Club, playing whist or euchre or listening to the salty yarns of his fellow members. He never spun yarns, himself—he talked as little at the club as elsewhere—but he enjoyed listening. When asked a question he answered it by a yes or no, if possible. When appealed to for an opinion he gave it in a few brief words, or shut off further appeal with a curt "Don't know." Cap'n Bailey Briggs' pet name for him was "The Sea Clam," and the sea clam is a large, tough bivalve found in the flats near the edge of deep water.

"I always said that the easiest way to open a sea clam is with a cold chisel," growled Cap'n Bailey. "When Hi Heath shuts up *his* shell even that wouldn't pry him out of it."

The Sea Clam had no desire to be subjected to the prying process this evening. He did not care for cards or company. He was restless and discontented and "blue." It was his birthday—no one knew it save he and no one else should know it—but he knew it. He was thirty-eight years old and so far his life had been just what he so often called life in general, "all nothin'." Bar accident there were many more years ahead of him, and they, too, would be "all nothin'."

His chance encounter with Samuel Hazen was partially responsible for his discontent and low spirits. Hazen, during their hours in the fog, had casually spoken of his family, of his wife and daughter, his business, his interest in the world's affairs. Ordinarily John Huyler Heath would have paid little heed to these references, but to-day—with

the consciousness of his thirty-eight drab, useless years heavy upon him—he had heeded and was curious.

This Hazen man had been happy always, he had everything he wanted so far, and anything he wanted in the future would be handed him on a silver platter. He worked hard—or he said he did—but he had much to work for, people to work for, a wife and child who loved him and who were interested in him and his work.

What had he—Hi Heath? Nothing. What would he ever have? The same nothing. He was not in the least envious of Hazen's wealth. It was those other possessions—affection, love, interests that were worth while. Who cared a continental about him? Nobody. Who would ever care? The same nobody.

He had been in Nauticook long enough. He was growing sick of it. Yet he knew perfectly well that he would soon grow just as sick of any other place.

He stopped his pacing. The dog, curled in the chair, opened one eye and cocked an ear. His master regarded him, smiling one-sidedly.

"Don't fret you, does it, Nuisance?" he observed, aloud. "A square meal when you're hungry and a soft place to sleep and you're contented. You're a lucky dog, did you know it? Yes, and darned lucky to be a dog. . . . Well, come on; might as well turn in."

His bedroom was a ten by eight apartment, with just room enough for a bed, a dresser and a chair. He undressed, blew out the lamp and lay down. Jack curled up on the braided mat by the door. The dog was asleep in a minute, but many minutes passed before his master dropped into a doze. Before he did so he had practically made up his mind to go away from Nauticook, for a time at least—possibly for good and all. Why not? Who cared a hang? Might as well go as stay.

He woke from a dream-troubled sleep and tossed and

tumbled for a time. Then he lit a match and looked at his watch. It was quarter past one. After another fruitless attempt at slumber he decided to get up, go into the living room and read. There was a library book there which he had begun and which was fairly interesting.

The living room was pitch dark of course, for Lorenzo Weeks had returned from his Come-Outer sociable long before and had retired. He was asleep, too, and making a noisy job of it. Heath lighted the lamp on the dining table. Propped against the base of that lamp was the evening mail which Lorenzo had brought from the post office. There was very little of it—the night mail seldom amounted to much. A circular from an installment house, the *Weekly Item* in its wrapper, and one bulky letter. Heath picked up the letter and glanced at the envelope.

It had traveled, that letter. It was addressed to Mr. John H. Heath, care George Collins, Lawyer, Fox Harbor, Maine. From Fox Harbor it had been forwarded, by Collins of course, to the Boston address from which Heath had last written. From Boston it was sent to Gloucester, in care of the schooner *Mary M.*, and from there to Nauticook. The original postmark was blurred, but its date was nearly a fortnight old.

The handwriting of the address was unfamiliar. On the back of the envelope was printed: "If not delivered in ten days return to Reverend H. H. Coxley, Coleville, Ohio." John Heath knew no one in Coleville, Ohio; had never before heard of the place. He remembered no one by the name of Coxley. He sat down in the rocker and tore open the envelope.

The letter was a very long one. A dozen pages, closely written on both sides. He began to read.

DEAR MR. HEATH:

You and I are strangers of course. You have never heard of me, nor I of you until very recently, less than

a week ago, to be exact. My reason for writing you is an urgent one. The ways of the Lord are indeed beyond human understanding, but that they are true and righteous altogether we know. The task has been laid upon me to convey to you a message and I hope and pray that His guiding hand may lead you in the right path and His wisdom make clear to you your duty, whatever that duty may be.

John Huyler Heath, having read thus far, shook a puzzled head. Whoever this person might be the phrasing of his letter so far was like that of one of the tracts which, from an unknown source, Lorenzo Weeks had been receiving at intervals during the past six months. Was it possible that the Reverend H. H. Coxley had sent those tracts and Lorenzo's mystery was about to be solved? No, the tracts, all of them, were postmarked Nauticook. Heath read on.

Before disclosing the message which I am appointed to convey to you, I feel, my dear sir, that I should warn you to prepare yourself for a great surprise—a shock. I trust, and devoutly pray, that your spirit may be made strong to bear it. It is an amazing thing which I must write you. I will write it now, without further preliminaries. I have been in charge of the First Presbyterian Church here in Coleville for nearly fifteen years. About two years ago a Mrs. Condon began attending our Sunday services—

The hand holding the sheet of notepaper dropped heavily upon the table. The paper fell from its fingers. Heath leaned back in the rocker. After a long interval the paper was again lifted to the light.

She was a newcomer to the town, a widow with one son, a boy.

Another interval. . . . Then—

She, sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by the boy, Raymond, came quite regularly to our gatherings. Occasionally I, on my weekly round of pastoral calls, dropped in the small cottage where the pair lived. During our acquaintance she told me very little of her history. Mr. Condon, her husband, she said, had been killed in a railway accident in the West somewhere, but, from other hints she dropped, I inferred that her life with him had not, for some time before his death, been happy. I think I never heard her express regret at his loss; in fact she almost never mentioned him. She was not a strong woman, nor had she, I inferred, means beyond a bare living. For a time she worked in a dressmaker's shop here in Coleville.

Last week she died, of pneumonia—

Again John Heath leaned back in the rocker and waited before continuing his reading.

The day before her passing she sent for me. She was weak, but conscious and rational and seemed perfectly aware that she could not recover. The woman whom we, of the church society, had engaged to stay with her during her illness, she sent from the room, and then—after I had promised her that I would reveal nothing of what she was about to tell to any one in Coleville—she insisted upon that —she told me a little of her life story. She spoke of her parentage, of her marriage to you and of her desertion of you, her lawful husband, for the man Condon. She had, I fear, suffered greatly. Verily, the wages of sin are death. Oh, my friend, if we weak mortals—

The sermonizing filled another long paragraph. Heath skipped it. His trembling fingers impatiently turned the page. He began again at the following:

But she told me more. Something she had never told any one, not even her partner in the great sin—Condon. In her desk was a slip of paper with your name and the name and address of the lawyer, Mr. Collins. She begged me—made me promise—to write you, in his care, and give

you this message. She bade me tell you that her boy, the lad Raymond, was born in May, 1893, the spring of the year after she left you. And, so she said and said again and again, he is *not* Condon's son, but *yours*. You, my dear Mr. Heath, are his father.

Lorenzo Weeks, sound asleep in the room adjoining the living room, was awakened by the sound of a door closing. He sat up in bed, blinking and startled.

"Hi!" he shouted. "Is that you?"

There was no answer. Lorenzo, wider awake by this time, became aware of a streak of light beneath his own door. Obviously the lamp in the living room was burning.

"Hi!" he shouted again. "What you doin'? 'Tain't time to turn out yet, is it? Can't be."

Still there was no reply. Lorenzo scratched a match. The alarm clock on the chair by the bed showed the time to be a quarter to two. He kicked away the sheet and blanket.

"Hi!" he cried. "Hi! What's the matter? Be you sick?"

He hastened to the door and opened it. The lamp on the table was burning, but there was no one in the living room. The door to his employer's bedroom was ajar. Mr. Weeks peered out into the darkness of the woodshed, but that, too, was untenanted. By this time he was pretty thoroughly frightened. He ran to the outside door. It was unlocked.

"Hi!" he yelled, thrusting his head out into the drizzle. "Hi! . . . Well, for the everlastin' mercy sakes! . . . *Well!*"

Heath was standing a few paces from the door. He spoke without turning.

"Yes, yes, Lo," he snapped. "I'm here. Stop screechin' and go back to bed. I'm all right."

"All *right!* Outdoor in the middle of a rainstorm in your

shirt tails! Be you sick or crazy or— Come in the house, you fool!"

"Go to bed."

"I'll go for the doctor, that's where I'll go. If you don't come into the house this minute I'll—"

Heath came in. He strode past his frantic helper without looking at him. Lorenzo ran after him and caught his arm.

"For salvation sakes, Hi!" he gasped. "What *is* the matter with you?"

"Nothin'. Shut up. . . . Let that dog in. He'll wake up the town."

Jack, who had followed his master from the house, was scratching and barking on the other side of the door, which had swung shut. Weeks obeyed orders mechanically, but his gaze was fixed upon his companion's face.

"My soul," he groaned. "You're white as a snowbank. And—and you look—you look's if you'd had a stroke, or somethin'. . . . What has come on to you? I vow I *will* fetch the doctor."

"Fetch nothin'. I'm all right, I tell you. I—I couldn't sleep, so I—well, I stepped outside for a little fresh air."

"Fresh air! Fresh water, you mean. You're wet through already, or next door to it. Aw come on, Hi—"

Heath turned on him. "Weeks," he commanded, almost savagely, "you're hired to do what I tell you, ain't you? Yes. Then go to bed and go now. . . . And take that damned dog with you."

"But—"

"Are you goin'?"

"Why—why, yes, I— But, honest, Hi, you—you scare me. You don't act natural."

"I'll act more unnatural if you don't clear out and let me alone. Get!"

Lorenzo "got." He collared the jubilant Jack, who was prancing about the room, apparently considering this middle

of the night party a grand lark, and dragged him into the bedroom. Heath closed the door behind them.

"Go to sleep, Lo," he growled, his hand on the knob. "Turn in and behave yourself. There's nothin' the matter with me. I—er—oh, I've got a headache and I want to be quiet. I'll be O.K. by mornin'."

There were three sheets of the letter—six pages—still unread. He set himself to read them. Amid the moralizing, the Scriptural quotations, and appeals to his duty as a forgiving Christian, certain sentences remained in his memory when the first reading was finished. Ella Condon—as she was known in Coleville—was buried in the Coleville cemetery. She had money put aside which had defrayed the expenses. . . . The boy, Raymond Condon, was, at the time the letter was written, still in the cottage he and his mother had occupied. The woman—nurse or whatever she was—would remain there with him for a time, a month perhaps. The Reverend Mr. Coxley expected, devoutly hoped to hear from him, John Heath, before that month was over. Ella Heath, on her deathbed—Mr. Coxley varied the term by referring to it as her "bed of repentance" and "couch of sorrow"—had pleaded with the minister to urge Heath—"the poor child's father"—to take charge of their boy. Raymond was alone in the world. For pity's sake, for her sake, for the sake of those days when they had been so happy together, please, please don't let him starve or grow up in an institution. She knew he would not, being the John Heath she had known, he could not. She had been a bad woman, but he was a good man. Please, oh, please.

Mr. Coxley added his pleas and pleases to hers. He should pray each day and night for a reply to this letter, a favorable reply. Meanwhile, my dear, dear friend, he remained—etc.

When Lorenzo Weeks, awakened by the alarm clock, emerged from his room at five-thirty that morning, the lamp

on the table was extinguished and John Heath was nowhere to be seen. A yell from the door was answered, however. He was down at the fish shanty and would be up when breakfast was ready.

He kept his word, but his breakfast was limited to two cups of coffee. Lorenzo, very much worried by his haggard appearance and lack of appetite, would have questioned and again suggested the doctor, but the Heath manner did not encourage either question or suggestion. He declared himself all right and gruffly bade his cook stop talking. He departed, in the *Sarepta,* for the fishing grounds immediately after breakfast and—which was as astonishing as any portion of his extraordinary behavior—did not take the dog with him.

For hours he sat in the stern of the motor boat, fifteen miles from land, his fishing lines trailing unheeded over the side. The luncheon which Weeks had prepared remained untouched in the pail. When he returned at four o'clock in the afternoon he left Lorenzo to clean and ice the few cod in the box and, without waiting to wash or change his clothes, walked uptown to the telegraph office. There he wrote and left for transmission the following "night letter."

Reverend H. H. Coxley,
Coleville, Ohio.

Can you meet me, with other party, next Tuesday at two o'clock at Grant House, Boston? I will pay fares and expenses. Do not mention my name to other party. Am not promising anything about matter in your letter, so do not count on it. Wire answer to me here at Nauticook, Mass.

J. H. Heath

CHAPTER IV

THE Grant House was, in 1904—it has been torn down since—an old-fashioned hotel on a cross street near Scollay Square, in Boston. In its day it had been prosperous and popular, a favorite stopping place for New England sea captains and their wives and families. Some of Nauticook's old-timers still patronized it. John Heath, forced to appoint a meeting place in his telegram to the Ohio clergyman, had chosen the Grant House offhand because its name was the first he remembered.

On the following Tuesday, at five minutes to two, he entered its rather seedy portals and walked to the desk. The clerk, also somewhat seedy, pushed the register toward him.

"Yes, sir," he said invitingly. "How do you do, sir? Glad to see you again. The usual sort of room, I suppose?"

"What's that?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"What's the usual sort of room?"

"Why—er—I mean a room such as we usually give you, Mr.—er—"

"You haven't ever given me one, as I know of. How much?"

"I can give you a very nice single room for four dollars. Fifth floor, front."

"Um-hm. . . . Got anybody name of Coxley stayin' here?"

The clerk consulted the index. He ran a finger down the list.

"C—C—C—" he muttered, conveying the impression that there were dozens of lodgers whose names began with that

initial. "C—Ah, here we are. Reverend H. H. Coxley, Coleville, Ohio."

"That's right."

"His room is 308. Third floor. A young man by the name of—er—Condon is with him."

"Young man? You mean a boy, don't you?"

"Why, possibly. I—"

"All right. I'll take that four-dollar room you was talkin' about."

"Yes, sir. Sign here, please. Thank you, Mr.—er—? Oh, yes, of course, Mr. Heath. . . . Front! . . . Shall I see if Mr. Coxley is in, or tell him that you are here, Mr. Heath?"

"No."

A bellboy, the style and condition of his uniform corresponding to that of the plush upholstery in the Grant House lobby, conducted Heath to the room on the fifth floor. He pocketed the quarter handed him and turned to go.

"Heave to, son," ordered Heath.

"Eh? . . . What did you say, sir?"

"Wait."

Sitting at the shaky little desk by the window, John Heath hastily scribbled a note on the hotel stationery and enclosed it in an envelope.

"Know where room 308 is?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"If there's a man name of Coxley in that room give him this. Don't give it to anybody else. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. Will there be any answer?"

"No."

The boy departed. Heath threw his hat on the bed and sat down in a chair by the window, looking down into the narrow street below. It was a crowded street, but the hurrying crowds did not interest him. His mind was busy

with a problem, a problem to which he had as yet found no answer.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said John Heath. "How d'ye do, Mr. Coxley? Mind shuttin' the door? Much obliged."

He had formed a mental picture of the Reverend Mr. Coxley from the latter's letter. For an imaginary likeness it was a good one. The minister looked about as he expected him to look.

"My dear Mr. Heath," said the caller, offering his hand. "I am very glad to meet you. Very, very glad indeed."

"Thanks. Have a chair."

Mr. Coxley sat. He had had no opportunity to form a mental picture of John Heath and the reality seemed to surprise him a little.

"You are an older man than I expected to find, Mr. Heath," he said.

"Thirty-eight last week."

"Oh! . . . Is that all? I—"

"Look older, eh? I shouldn't wonder. Well, before we say anything else, Mr. Coxley, I guess likely I ought to thank you for all the trouble I—and the rest—have put you to."

"Not at all. I did only my duty as a Christian."

"Well, you're away ahead of a good many Christians, at that. You brought the—er—other party along, I understand."

"Yes, Mr. Heath. Raymond is waiting in my room now. I should have brought him up here with me, but for your note."

"Yes, I wrote I didn't want you to. I don't."

"But, my dear sir, I trust that you—"

"Don't trust nothin'—yet awhile. I'm as far from makin' up my mind as I was in the beginnin'."

"But you sent for us."

"I know. Maybe if I waited another day I shouldn't have sent. Or I might have. I told you in the telegram that I wasn't promisin' anything. I ain't now. Anyhow I'll pay all the bills, that much you can bank on."

He turned back to the window. Mr. Coxley fidgeted nervously in his chair.

"Perhaps," he ventured, after a moment, "you may like to have me tell you more about your—er—about Mrs. Condon. I—"

"No," sharply.

"Oh, I see. . . . Well—"

"Tell me somethin' about the—the boy. What sort of boy is he?"

"He is, I think, a very good sort of boy. Good looking, well-mannered, bright, up in his studies. He is popular among his schoolmates, or so we gather."

"Of course you haven't told him anything about me—who I am?"

"Not a word. Naturally he supposes that—Mr.—the other man—was his father."

"Does he remember him?"

"Only as a child remembers. I gathered that your—that his mother and Condon had not lived together since Raymond was quite young. Raymond, I am sure, does not know that he has a relative in the world."

"What excuse did you give him for bringin' him on here?"

"Well, I—that has troubled me, Mr. Heath. You see, your telegraphed instructions were so very explicit in that respect that I could tell him nothing of the truth."

"Sure. So you told him somethin' that wasn't the truth. Well, we all have to lie once in a while. Some folks do it easier than others."

The reverend gentleman's back straightened.

"I am not in the habit of lying, Mr. Heath," he said, stiffly.

"I know; that's what I meant."

Mr. Coxley stared fixedly. His companion met the stare without the least embarrassment. The minister cleared his throat.

"I—er—well, from something I said, Raymond inferred that I was obliged to take a trip to Boston on business."

"You didn't say whose business?"

"I—er— No, I did not. I asked him if he would like to go with me and he said he would."

"Queer youngster if he didn't. Well, Mr. Coxley, as I said in the beginnin', I'm very thankful to you. You are a good man, there's no doubt about that."

"I did only my—"

"Yes, yes; I know. . . . And now, of course, you expect me to say what is goin' to be done next. . . . Well, I can't tell you."

"But, my dear Mr. Heath!"

"Hold on! Mr. Coxley, I won't ask you to put yourself in my place, for," bitterly, "I wouldn't ask that of a dog. All I want you to understand is that this thing has come onto me like a stroke of lightnin'. I didn't know, until I got your letter that—that she was alive, or had been alive up to a few weeks ago. I didn't know there was a child, to say nothin' of its bein' my child. . . . Look here," sharply, "you're sure about that? This boy *is* mine?"

"Your wife said so. She said it over and over again. He was born eight months after she left you. She gave me the date of his birth, May 5, 1893. She repeated it, made me write it down. I am sure she was speaking the truth. She worshiped Raymond. If you could have seen and heard her, when she mentioned him, as I did, you—"

"Yes, yes. . . . Well, where was he born?"

"I asked her that. She told me, but I cannot remember, except that it was a town in New York State. I am sorry —it was remiss of me, perhaps—but I did not make a note of it as I did the date, and she was so very weak that I could not press her with questions."

"The boy would know, wouldn't he?"

"Why, of course. That didn't occur to me. I will ask him."

"You needn't. If I ever want to know, I'll ask him myself, maybe, sometime or other. That is, provided I— Humph! Born in '93. That makes him eleven year old."

"Yes. He is rather small for his age, but he was eleven on his last birthday; he told me so, himself."

"Who— Oh, never mind!"

"But I am glad to answer your questions, Mr. Heath. You were about to say—?"

"Nothin' much. I was wonderin' who he looked like."

"He is the image of his mother."

He added particulars concerning the boy's appearance. John Heath, who was again looking out of the window, apparently did not hear him, for, in the middle of the description, he interrupted.

"Mr. Coxley," he said, "I've been orderin' you around consider'ble and you've been mighty obligin' so far, more so than I would have been in your place, I guess. I realize this isn't really any of your business."

"It is the Lord's business and I am, however unworthy, His agent. . . . Mr. Heath—"

"Yes?"

"There are doubts in your mind; questions as to what you should or should not do. Why not ask Him? In my letter, you will remember, I begged you to pray for divine guidance. Have you done so?"

"No."

"Then why not now? You and I together, here, this minute?"

"No."

"But, my dear friend—"

"No!" firmly. "All nothin'."

"What! . . . *What* did I understand you to say?"

"I said 'twas all nothin', that sort of thing, so far as I'm concerned. I've upset you, of course, but—well, honest, Mr. Coxley, I never had much patience with the kind of religion that forgets all about prayin' when things are goin' right and then whines for help when they're goin' wrong. God A'mighty is supposed to know everything; He probably knows a hypocrite when He hears one. He isn't goin' to hear me—now."

The minister lifted a protesting hand.

"False pride is—"

"*Pride!* Good grief! What have *I* got to be proud about? No; if the Almighty knows everything and is responsible for everything, He is responsible for puttin' this up to me. I'll settle it myself, somehow or other. . . . Mr. Coxley, will you do me one more favor? Will you go away now, and leave me till, say, half-past five? Then, if you'll come back again, I may have some sort of plan figured out. Will you do that?"

"Certainly. But, really, Mr. Heath—"

"I know. It ain't your worry, but it's got to be mine. See you here at half-past five."

When the clergyman, his feelings still ruffled, again entered that room, John Heath's manner was much more businesslike.

"Mr. Coxley," he said, "I haven't figured this through to the end, but I have figured it part way. I've got to see the boy."

"Naturally. And, having seen him, I am sure—"

"You mustn't be. All either one of us can be sure of

now is that I'm goin' to see him. We'll all want somethin' to eat pretty soon—he will, anyhow, if he's like the average youngster. The dinin' room in this place is downstairs somewheres, I suppose likely. You and he meet me just outside the door of it at quarter past six. Will you do that?"

"Yes. Yes, indeed. But—but who shall I tell him you are? Shall I say—"

"You can say I'm an acquaintance of yours named Heath and, if you want to, that I've asked you two to supper. That'll be enough to start with. When, or if, it is needful to say more I'll say it."

He washed his face and hands, brushed his hair, and made a hasty change of linen. At five minutes after six he descended in the elevator to the main floor of the hotel, and took a position behind one of the imitation marble pillars in the lobby, where he could see the entrance to the dining room, which was in the rear of the building. Soon afterward he saw Coxley approaching from the direction of the elevators. He gave the clergyman but a glance, however; his attention was fixed upon his companion, the boy, Raymond Condon.

His son! He could not grasp the fact. He did not really believe it; he tried to, but it seemed too impossible, for belief.

The pair, the parson and the boy, stood together by the door of the dining room, looking in. John Heath, from his station in the shadow of the pillar, looked at Raymond. He was a good-looking boy, sturdy, although rather short for his years, dark-haired and dark-eyed. His profile, as he peered into the lighted dining room, gave Heath a start; it was like a portrait cut from the pages of his own past life. He had destroyed every one of his wife's photographs as he had destroyed every personal belonging which reminded him of her, but here was a new, living photo-

graph. Coxley had not exaggerated. If the lad was, as he declared, his mother's image at the time of her death, he was even more the image of what she had been when the man she married first knew her. There was no trace of John Heath in that young profile, it was all Ella Barbour.

Heath was by no means a sentimental person. Whatever sentiment might ever have been in his make-up had been knocked out of it long ago, or he supposed it had. Nevertheless, it was nearer twenty-five than fifteen minutes after six, when he stepped from behind the pillar and walked toward the couple awaiting him. Coxley saw him coming and spoke to his companion. Raymond turned. Father and son faced each other.

The minister—who was distinctly sentimental—was a good deal agitated. His greeting was hurried and nervous.

"Oh, here you are!" he stammered. "I—er—I was beginning to fear I had made a mistake in the time. Raymond, my boy, this is—er—er—"

"My name's Heath," broke in John, extending a hand. "How are you, young fellow?"

Raymond and he shook hands. Coxley stood in shocked amazement. The situation was without precedent in his life, it was even beyond anything he had ever read in books. He, himself, was overwhelmed by the touching solemnity, the wonder of it. He could have shed tears, was close to doing that very thing. And this man—this father meeting his son for the first time—showed no emotion, did not break down, merely offered to shake hands with his own child, as he might with a casual stranger. And he was smiling, actually smiling.

The Reverend Coxley's doubts—doubts engendered by the conversations in the room on the fifth floor—as to whether this hard, blunt-spoken, free-thinking scoffer was a person fit to take charge of a young boy, his own or another's, were

strengthened by this unfeeling exhibition. His manner, for some time thereafter, was constrained and formal.

John Heath's, however, was not. He signaled to the hovering head waiter, followed the latter to a table at the far corner of the room, and motioned to his companions to be seated and sat down himself.

"Well, Raymond—that's your name, isn't it—Raymond?—how about it? Hungry, are you?"

Raymond, to whom head waiters and hotel dining rooms were novelties and a bit overpowering, stammered that he didn't know, he guessed so.

"I guess so, too. When I was your age I could eat in my sleep. . . . Well, let's see," consulting the menu: "What'll we start with? There's Little Necks—they've quahaugs, of course. Ever eat any quahaugs?"

"No, sir. I—I don't think so."

"I don't think so, either. They don't grow thick in Ohio, I shouldn't wonder. Soil ain't right for the trees, they tell me. There's soup, though. Soup's always good—when it *is* good. Suppose we get under way with some soup. And after that—"

He ordered a liberal meal. The minister noticed, with some surprise, that he appeared to know what to order and that he accepted the waiter's suggestions only when they appealed to him. Also the condescension with which those suggestions were offered lessened as the ordering proceeded. Obviously this odd fisherman could say no, without hesitation or apology, even to a waiter.

Another thing he noticed, as the dinner proceeded. Heath, although he urged his guests to eat, ate little himself. He stirred the food on his plate with his knife and fork, but he tasted but a few mouthfuls. And, whenever Raymond looked away, about the room, John Heath looked at him. When the boy was addressing him, or Coxley, the scrutiny was not as

apparent, certainly not sufficiently so as to embarrass its object; but, throughout the meal, it was there.

He led the lad to talk, asked him questions concerning his school and sports, if he liked baseball, what time he got up on the morning of the Fourth of July, if the circus ever came to Coleville. Only once, when the boy mentioned his mother, was he interrupted; then Heath changed the subject. A keener and more worldly-wise person than the minister would have understood that he was drawing the boy out of his shell, trying to get him to speak naturally and without reserve, sizing him up, so to speak. Coxley, whose wisdom was not of this world, did not understand; all this triviality and lack of solemnity during what should have been, to a right-minded father, an emotional crisis, pained him. He began to fear that his writing the letter and obeying the summons to Boston might have been a mistake. Perhaps it would have been safer, and better, to have placed Raymond in an institution, such as the Mission School for Boys at Dayton. The expenses for that could, probably, have been arranged, and, at least, there he would have been brought up in a respectable, orthodox atmosphere.

After the ice cream, Heath rose and suggested that they adjourn to "somewheres out in the front hall." "More comf'table sittin' out there," he added. "Chairs ain't so hard."

He left them in a secluded corner of the lobby and walked slowly to the cigar counter. His mind was not quite made up when he started on that short walk; when he came back it was.

"Now we can smoke and get ahead with our talk," he said. "Cigar, Mr. Coxley? . . . No? Well, just as you say. Raymond, you haven't picked up the habit yet, eh?"

Raymond flushed, laughed in an embarrassed fashion, and admitted that he had not. John Heath glanced at the horrified expression upon the clergyman's face, smiled slightly,

and settled himself in an armchair. No one spoke for a moment, then Heath leaned forward.

"Well, Raymond," he said, slowly, "you and Mr. Coxley have had quite a trip together. Had a good time so far?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's right. Mr. Coxley told you he had to come to Boston on business, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir."

"Um-hm. He didn't tell you what the business was. 'Twas to see me. And he didn't tell you who I was. Now, I'm goin' to surprise you. I'm a—well, I'm a kind of—of relation of yours. You didn't know that, did you?"

The boy was surprised, there was no doubt of that. And, boylike, he did not know how to answer. Heath did not wait for a reply.

"Yes, I'm your relation. About the only relation you've got, I shouldn't wonder; and you didn't know you had one, of course. Well, you have, and 'twas to see me, and let me see you, that Mr. Coxley brought you on here with him. That's so, ain't it, Mr. Coxley?"

"Yes. Yes, Mr. Heath. You see, Raymond, your mother—"

Heath broke in. "Never mind that," he ordered, quickly. "Mr. Coxley had heard about me and so he wrote me a letter about you. Bein' relations so, I thought we ought to get acquainted. And now we are acquainted, eh?"

"Yes. . . . Yes, sir."

"Um-hm. Well, I live about a hundred miles from here at a place called Nauticook. It's right on the edge of the salt water. You never saw much salt water in your life, I guess, did you?"

Raymond's eyes sparkled. "I saw it this morning," he declared. "Mr. Coxley took me down to the wharves, where the ships and things were. I saw it then."

"Did, eh? Well, that was only a little mite of it. Where

I live you can see it as far as you can look. There's more salt water to look at than there is anything else. I go out on it every day, earn my livin' that way. Like boats, do you?"

Coxley put in a word. "He has never seen many," he explained. "This morning's experience was a novelty for him."

"Sure. Well, Raymond, if you come down to Nauticook along with me I'll show you a lot of boats, all kinds and sizes. Ever do any fishin'?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I go fishing at home. I like to catch fish."

"There is a river near us," explained Coxley.

"I see. What do you catch when you go fishin' out yonder? Perch?"

"Yes, sir. Perch and—and sometimes a pickerel and—and sunfish and bullheads—"

"Bullheads? That's a new breed to me. What do they look like?"

"They're funny-looking. Big mouths and—and horns, kind of."

"Oh, I get you now! We used to call 'em hornpouts when I was a kid. Well, if you come down to Nauticook I'll show you some reg'lar fish. Big fellows, pretty nigh as big as you are. I go fishin' every day. I'm a fisherman by trade."

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, I am." He hesitated, apparently not quite certain how to continue. Then, after an instant's thought, he went on. "I live down there in a little house, just me and another man and a dog. Like dogs?"

"Yes, sir. I had one once. His name was Spot."

"This one's name's Nuisance, but we generally call him Jack. Well, the three of us, Lo Weeks and me and Jack, we live in this little house right close to the shore. You'll think it's a funny place, I guess likely, when you see it. More like campin' out than reg'lar housekeepin'. If you've been used to livin' in a big house—"

"He hasn't, I assure you. Not at all, not at all." This

from the minister. "You will remember, Mr. Heath, that I wrote you—"

"All right, all right. . . . Well, Raymond, this is what I've got in my mind: I was wonderin' if you wouldn't like to come along down to Nauticook with me and—er—sort of visit for a spell. Go out fishin' with me sometimes, and learn to swim, maybe, and about boats, and—oh, I don't know—lots of things. How would you like that, think?"

The boy obviously did not know what to think. He looked at the speaker and then at Coxley. The latter tried to help.

"I think you would enjoy it, Raymond," he said. "I—er—I feel that you would. I *think* it is the right thing. I am sure your—your—Mr. Heath, I mean—will be kind to you and do his best to rear you as—as—"

"There, there!" brusquely. "Never mind to the rearin'. We'll see about all that part later. What I'm sayin' now is that if Raymond wants to go to Nauticook to-morrow mornin' with me and stay for a spell—you can call it a try-out for both of us, if you want to, Coxley—why, I'll take him along. What do you say, Raymond?"

Raymond said nothing. He was very solemn. John Heath rose from the easy-chair.

"You two think it out together," he said. "The train leaves at half-past seven to-morrow mornin'. I'll be in my room all evenin', Mr. Coxley. I'll be waitin' for you there. Good night, boy."

He turned and walked away. The minister hesitated, then, bidding Raymond wait where he was, he hastened after him and caught his arm.

"Mr. Heath," he protested. "I—really I don't feel that such a responsibility as this should be left to me. Or to that child, either. After all, you are his father and it is for you to—"

"To order him to go, you mean? Well, maybe that'll be needful, but I don't think so. I hope not. I was ordered

around consider'ble when I was a boy by folks that hadn't any right to do it, and it didn't make me care too much for the orderers. I didn't say much then, I didn't dare to, but I've always remembered. If—mind you I'm still sayin' if—he and I are goin' to pull together he ought to start without prejudices. I saw his eyes shine when I told about the fishin' and the dog and the campin'-out. He'll be willin' to go, I guess, if you tell him you think he'll have a good time. But, look here, Mr. Coxley, don't you drop the least grain of a hint about my bein' his father. He isn't to know that, you understand."

"But you have already told him you are a relative of his. He is only a boy, but he is a bright boy, and he is certain to ask questions."

"Probably he will. If he does, tell him I'm a—well, a kind of uncle. That'll do as well as anything."

"But—but why that? He will have to know the truth some day."

"Why will he?"

"Why! Surely," in horrified astonishment, "you don't propose— He is your son, your own son!"

John Heath shrugged. Then he turned.

"See here," he demanded sharply, "have you thought for a minute what I'm goin' to tell the Nauticook folks about him? I've never said a word about a son to them. What excuse will I give for havin' one all these years and never mentionin' him till now, when he's eleven years old?"

"But if you tell them—"

"Oh," impatiently, "tell them what? They don't know anything about me. I went away from Nauticook when I was younger than he is and I came back a long while afterwards. Nobody knows where I was all the time while I was gone, where I lived or how; I've taken care they shouldn't. Nobody in the town knows I was married."

"Oh! . . . Oh, dear me!"

"You ain't surprised at that, are you? Good Lord, man, was it somethin' to *brag* about? . . . There, there! the boy'll go with me willin'ly enough if you use a little judgment when you talk with him. Don't give him the idea that he's goin' to stay for keeps—perhaps he isn't. I don't know how this is goin' to work out. You don't. Nobody can. I don't know how he and I will get along together. I tell you this much, if I had been asked to pick out a man to bring up a boy the way he ought to be brought up, I'd have picked pretty nigh anybody but myself. He is a decent kid, or seems to be. I've been a pretty rough customer in my time. Am yet, so far as that goes."

It was unusual for the Reverend Coxley to find himself at a loss for words, but he was in that situation now. The last portion of his companion's speech was in precise accordance with his own impressions. Heath seemed to guess the reason for his silence, for he smiled grimly.

"Well, I'm goin' upstairs," he said. "No, no; don't ask me anything else. I ain't much of a talker generally, and I've talked more to-day than I have for a month. So long; I'll see you later. Bring a list of what I owe you for expenses and fares; I want to pay it. And I hope you understand I realize there's a lot I owe you that money won't settle for. I can't pay that, but I'm much obliged, just the same."

At the door of the elevator he turned once more.

"Coxley," he observed, "if I was you I wouldn't tell him it's his duty to go with me. A boy that age don't know what duty means and he don't like the sound."

Lorenzo Weeks received a telegram the following morning. It was short but to the point.

Coming on noon train. Bringing company with me. Have plenty to eat.

J. H. Heath

CHAPTER V

MR. WEEKS was, as he might have said, "all fizzed up" by that telegram. Heath's departure for Boston had been sudden and the cook's question as to his reason for going and the probable time of his return unanswered. Only once before during the years of their residence together had John Heath gone to the city, and then his errand was in connection with the fish business. Lorenzo took it for granted that fish were responsible for the present trip, but who on earth the "company" might be was beyond imagining. They never had "company" at Seven-up. Not once had a third person remained overnight in the little house.

And now company was coming; apparently a lot of company, for he was ordered to provide plenty to eat. The butcher's cart visited that part of the village only every other day and this was not one of those days. Lorenzo rushed up town and spent an agitated half hour chasing what he called the "meat cart" along the route it was supposed to travel on this particular day. He caught up with it at last, away down on the East End Road, and astonished its driver by purchasing three pounds of steak and an equal weight of pork chops. At the grocery he bought so extensively that the clerk wished to know if he was cal'latin' to have a party.

"Don't waste time talkin' about what I'm goin' to have," sputtered Lorenzo. "If you don't get them bundles done up pretty soon I'll have a fit."

"That so? Well, have it on the platform; I'm busy in here."

With his arms heaped with parcels and more in his pockets he galloped home and plunged into a frenzy of preparation.

He had no idea how many places to set at the table, but he finally decided on five, then subtracted one, only to add it again. He brought extra chairs from the bedrooms.

At noon the meal was ready, or nearly so. The potatoes and succotash were cooked. The steak was on the fire. The apple pie he had bought at the bake shop was warming in the oven. The train was certain to be a few minutes late and it would take at least ten minutes more for the depot wagon to bring Heath and the "company" from the station. Mr. Weeks, after a careful survey, sighed in satisfaction, and decided that he might now allow himself time to wash and brush up.

Just then he heard a sound at the door and, turning, saw Jack, or Nuisance, furtively departing for the open air with one of the pork chops—Lorenzo had provided them for breakfast next morning—in his mouth.

Mr. Weeks' first utterance will not be quoted here. It was comprehensive and personally descriptive, not only of the dog, but his parentage. If the unknown donor of the anti-profanity tract could have heard it, he—or she—would have decided that the seed had fallen upon stony ground. Jack may not have understood the words, but the tone was unmistakable. He yelped apprehensively from behind the pork chop, but he held on to the latter. He rushed into the yard and fled. Behind him thundered Lorenzo.

The chase was long and, of course, fruitless. It ended at a spot fifty yards away and on the beach. Weeks collapsed upon an overturned lobster pot and fought for breath. Far down the shore a four-legged object was still moving rapidly. The pork chop moved with it.

"You—you—you—" panted Lorenzo, and again disregarded the teaching of the tract by thinking the remainder of the sentence. After a period of gasping, choking and mopping his forehead with his sleeve, he rose, groaned, and plodded wearily back to Seven-up.

Before the door stood the depot wagon. As he looked, it rolled away toward the village. John Huyler Heath and the expected "company" were already inside the cottage.

They were there when he, the cook, stumbled across the threshold. Heath was standing by the cookstove, holding in one hand a frying pan from which ascended a cloud of smoke. The room was filled with smoke and fragrant with the aroma of scorched beef. Beside the table stood a boy, a stranger.

Lorenzo's gaze took in the tableau; then it centered upon the frying pan. With a choked exclamation he darted forward and snatched it from his employer's hand.

"Salvation's mercy!" he wailed. "Look at it! Look! That everlastin' dog!"

"Dog?"

"Yes, dog! That's what that is, just that everlastin' dog! Look at it!"

John Heath looked.

"Well, well!" he observed, dryly. "It was a nice day, so you fried the dog. Good idea!"

"Eh? . . . Oh, *don't* talk so numb! I don't feel funny, if you do. I fried three pounds of the best top of the round beefsteak, that's what I fried. And he sneaked up and stole a pork chop! My soul! What'll I do now?"

Heath shook his head. "You might open a window to begin with," he suggested coughing.

He opened one himself. The atmosphere of the room cleared slightly. Weeks paid no attention; he was still gazing at the contents of the pan.

"There I stood," he moaned, "a-cookin' that steak and—and all to once I heard a noise. And when I turned around, there he was—"

"Who was?"

"Why, the dog, of course."

"I see. . . . Well, all right, Lo—"

"No, you don't see, neither. I ain't told you half of it yet. I never thought one thing about that dog and—"

"All right. Tell the rest by and by. Come on, Raymond; I'll show you where your room is. Bring your valise."

He led the way to and up the flight of stairs at the end of the room. The boy, picking up a small traveling bag, followed him. Lorenzo carried the smoking pan to the sink and busied himself, trying, with a knife, to scrape the thickest of the burnt patches from the steak. The ruin was not complete, there was a chance of salvage.

Heath descended the stairs alone. Weeks turned to greet him.

"It ain't so bad I was afraid 'twas," he announced, almost cheerfully. "And it wa'n't my fault anyhow. Accidents will happen. No use cryin'. What's done's done."

"Well done, too, I'd say. Dinner ready?"

"Sartin." Then, as the thought occurred to him for the first time: "Why, what have you done with all the comp'ny, Hi?"

"He's upstairs. Be down in a minute."

"Eh? No, no. I don't mean that boy; I mean the rest of 'em."

"What rest? He's all there is."

"Hi Heath, do you mean to tell me that boy I see just now is all the comp'ny you fetched?"

"Yes."

"My salvation! Why—why, I've laid in grub enough for a vessel's crew! Didn't you say, in that telegram that you was fetchin' company and I must have plenty to eat?"

"Um-hm."

"Well, there! If plenty to eat didn't mean a *lot* of comp'ny, what did it mean?"

"Meant one healthy boy. . . . Oh, hello, Raymond! Ready for dinner, are you? Raymond, this is Mr. Lorenzo Weeks. He's the most important man aboard this craft. Lo,

shake hands with Raymond Condon. Raymond's goin' to visit with us a spell. He's my nephew."

Lorenzo's eyes and mouth opened.

"Your—your nephew!" he gasped. "Why, I never knew you had a nephew."

"Well, you know now. Live and learn. Turn to, all hands! Let's eat."

As long as he lives Raymond Condon will never forget that first meal at Seven-up. The table, set hit or miss, with all sorts of dishes and cutlery. Mr. Weeks in his black shirt sleeves at one end of the board and John Heath, whose shirt sleeves were white, at the other. The abundance of food and the way he was urged to eat more and more of it. The queer little room, with its odd furnishings. The open door and windows, with their glimpses of sea and sand and hills and pines. The ancient and fishlike smell which the breeze brought with it from the beach below. The strange twang of his companions' voices and the curious, unfamiliar words they used.

He remembers how, in the middle of dinner, a fuzzy dog peered apprehensively around the door jamb and, after this preliminary survey, sneaked inside and curled up very quietly in a corner. How, a few minutes later, Lorenzo Weeks noticed the presence of this visitor and leaped from his chair with a roar, brandishing a fork with a hot potato on the end of it. With what celerity the dog flew out of that door, to take up his station at a safe distance on the top of a sand dune, where he howled lugubriously at intervals. He remembers Mr. Weeks' lengthy narrative of the theft of the pork chop and Heath's curt comments.

His memory is quite as clear of the afternoon walk with his newly discovered relative along the beach, where, as they passed beyond the shelter of the long sand strip forming the natural breakwater of Nauticook harbor, the great waves leaped, curled over and crashed in frothing thunder upon

the shore. The surf, the white shells, the looping, dipping gulls, the steamers and schooners on the horizon, all were brand-new and wonderful to him.

John Heath did not talk a great deal. Each time the boy looked up, however, he found that the man was looking down at him. When, after the two-mile stroll, they turned back, Heath asked a question.

"How do you like it so far?" he inquired.

"Great!" said Raymond Condon, and meant it.

"Um-hm. Nothin' like this out in Ohio, eh?"

"No, sir. Mr. Heath," pointing, "is it out there where you go fishing?"

"Yes. Think you'd like to go out with me to-morrow mornin'?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. If the weather's fair you can. And—er—Raymond—"

"Yes, sir."

"Long's you and I are goin' to chum around here for a while, maybe you might as well start in callin' me 'Uncle John.'"

"Yes, sir. I mean Uncle John."

"That's right. Hello, here's Jack, come to meet us. Thinks it safer to go home under convoy, probably. Well, sneak thief," addressing the dog, who was wagging his tail so violently that three-quarters of his body wagged with it, "what are you shiverin' about? If you're cold, better go see Lorenzo; he'll make it warm for you."

That whole day and evening were so strange and novel that it was not until nine o'clock, when he went upstairs to his bed in the little room off the attic, that Raymond found time to be lonely. There, with the lamp extinguished, in darkness and, except for the crooning of the wind, in absolute quiet, he thought of home and of his mother and was very lonely indeed. Mr. Coxley had repeatedly told him

that he must be a "brave little man." Brave little men did not cry, in public. In private, however, it was different; this one cried himself to sleep.

Downstairs in the living room John Heath and Lorenzo Weeks sat, each in a rocking-chair, the former reading the Boston paper and the latter fidgeting with repressed curiosity. The time came when repression reached its limit.

"Say, Hi—" pleaded Weeks.

"Um-hm?"

"Say, look here! Ain't you goin' to say nothin'?"

"Thought I was sayin' it."

"What? Aw, come now! I mean ain't you ever goin' to say nothin' else *but* nothin'?"

"Hope to."

"Well, then say it! Who is this boy? Where'd he come from? Who's his folks? He's your nephew, you say. Well, how—who— Aw, tell me about it, Hi."

Heath laid the paper on the table. He had, during the previous night, concocted a story, the story he meant should be accepted in Nauticook. The truth, the whole truth, no one knew save the Ohio clergyman and he, John Heath. Coxley had promised the dying woman that he would tell no one what she had told him, no one save her husband, the father of her child. He had—so he declared and Heath believed him—kept that promise. Before they parted in Boston Heath had exacted another promise, namely that the minister would continue to keep the secret. To questioners and Coleville he might explain that Raymond had been taken in charge by an eastern relative, which was, of course, the literal truth. After considerable debate the good man's conscience was eased. He agreed that, perhaps, it was best to keep Ella Condon's sinful past from the world, particularly from her son. So far as he was concerned it should never be revealed.

So that was all right. Nauticook, however, would be very

curious; it would want to know precisely what Lorenzo Weeks was now demanding to be told—the whos and wheres and whys. Its desire for information must be gratified or it would invent explanations even more disgraceful than the true one. To meet this situation John Heath had prepared his story. It was not an altogether satisfactory story, but if certain of its details were vague, vague they would have to remain.

"Well, Lo," he said deliberately, "it's about like this: This boy's mother died a couple of weeks ago. That letter you brought from the post office a few nights back told me she was dead and that Raymond was left all alone."

"She was a widow, eh?"

"I said the boy was left all alone, didn't I? The folks out there wrote me—"

"Out where? Where was it him and her lived?"

"Oh, out West, in Ohio."

"Ohio, eh? I never knew you had folks out in Ohio. Your ma and pa both come from right around here. Yes, and your father died long afore you and your mother moved away. If this out-West woman was your sister—"

"Who said she was my sister?"

"Why— Oh, then Raymond's dad was your brother? . . . But when was *he* born? Did your ma marry again after she left here?"

"No. . . . *Now* what's the matter with you?"

Mr. Weeks sighed. "There'll be somethin' the matter with me pretty soon if I don't get this straight," he declared. "You never had no brothers or sisters when you lived here. And you say your mother never married afterwards. Then —then—" desperately, "well, if this boy's your nephew there's somethin' mighty funny somewheres, that's all *I've* got to say!"

John Heath filled and lighted his pipe before replying. He had realized there were complications in this story of his,

but he had not foreseen all of them. Obviously there was need of revision.

"Oh, well," he admitted, with a shrug, "he isn't my real nephew. He's just a—a kind of relation, sort of a cousin, you might say. He'll probably call me 'Uncle John,' but—hang it, he's got to call me somethin'."

"Sure, sure! That's all right. I understand now. Anybody's liable to have cousins scattered around. When it comes to brothers and sisters, though—"

"Yes, yes," hurriedly. "So, as the poor youngster had nobody in the world, when his mother died, they wrote to me."

"Who did?"

"The folks who were lookin' after him."

"Wa'n't they relations, neither?"

"No. I just told you he was left all alone!"

"My soul's mercy! The ways of Providence are past findin' out and that's a fact! Here's you, an only child, and here's this boy's mother and she was an only child; and his father, he was another only child; and this Raymond he's—"

"Oh, do be still! Are you goin' to do all the talkin' or shall I?"

"Why, you, of course. What would I want to talk for?"

The remainder of the narrative proceeded about as it had begun, Heath endeavoring to explain and Weeks interrupting every other minute. At last, however, the end was reached.

"So that's how it was," concluded the narrator. "Now you understand, don't you?"

"Sure, sure! Poor little feller! Well, maybe a little spell down here will do him good; help him forget his ma and the like of that. But what'll become of him after he leaves here? Who'll he go to then?"

"Don't know. That isn't settled—yet."

"How long do you cal'late he'll stay along with us, Hi?"

"Don't know that, either. . . . Good night. I'm goin' to turn in."

Of course Lorenzo's curiosity was far from satisfied with this somewhat sketchy explanation. He wished to know a great deal more, about Raymond's parents, about Coleville, who the people were who had taken charge of him after his mother's death, why they had written to John Heath, why the latter had never before mentioned his Ohio cousin, whether or not Mrs. Condon had left any money—all sorts of things. Knowing Heath, he realized that further questioning in that quarter would be fruitless. But the boy himself must know; Lorenzo meant to cross-examine Raymond at the first opportunity.

He did, but he learned nothing of importance. Raymond remembered little about his father. Of his mother he could tell only that she and he had lived in several other places before moving to Coleville. He was born, so his mother had said, in a place called Brayton in New York State. His father had been a traveling salesman, he thought—he was not sure. The man who had written to John Heath was the minister in Coleville. His name was Coxley. Why he had written Raymond did not know.

Lorenzo, however, had learned something, or thought he had. When, at the grocery or the Come-Outer Bethel or the post office, Nauticook gossips demanded to be told who this boy was that Hi Heath had visiting him, Mr. Weeks was ready with his answer. Raymond Condon was a second cousin of Hi's from out West. He was an orphan and, being as his ma had just passed away, Hi had sent for him to kind of cheer him up and take his mind off his troubles, as you might say. When asked—as he was often asked—if Mrs. Condon had been a wealthy woman and if Heath had fallen heir to her wealth, or a portion of it, Lorenzo merely looked wise and refused to answer. To questions concerning the length of the lad's visit his reply was a repetition of his employer's words, with slight additions of his own.

"That," said Mr. Weeks, importantly, "we don't know yet. It may be short, or it may be long. It all depends."

So, in the course of time, as the Condon boy was still an inhabitant of Seven-up, Nauticook invented an answer of its own. At the post office heads were nodded and winks exchanged.

"The kid's got money comin' to him some day or other and Hi don't mean to let it slip too far away. He don't say much, but he's deep—Hi Heath is."

The deep one, of course, heard echoes of these whispers, but he did not deny them. Neither did he affirm anything. This explanation, if it satisfied Nauticook, satisfied him. It would do as well as any other. So long as the truth was not known he was content. If the Reverend H. H. Coxley kept his word he saw no reason why it should ever be known.

All the whispering, however, was to come later—much later. For the first few days after his arrival Nauticook was scarcely aware of Raymond Condon. And Raymond, himself, was getting acquainted with Seven-up and its occupants. His first afternoon's experience had convinced him that it was a queer place and that his new uncle and Mr. Weeks were odd people, unlike any he had ever met before. He was heartsick and homesick at intervals during that first week, particularly at night. During the days he was kept busy and the strangeness of everything occupied his mind.

The morning after his arrival he and Heath went out to the fishing grounds in the *Sarepta*. The start was made at the usual hour. They breakfasted at five, by lamplight, and half an hour later they were under way. Jack accompanied them, of course.

It was a hazy morning, with a light fluff of cloud along the eastern horizon, but Heath offered the opinion that the haze would "burn off" after a little and the day be clear and fine. To Raymond the early start was a wonderful and thrilling adventure. The dim light, the calling of the gulls, the cool

morning breeze, the salty smells from the march banks and the sand flats which the rising tide was rapidly covering, the receding shore, dusky and vague in the shadows, the low grumble of the surf, the sense of mystery and strangeness. He sat on the bench in the cockpit, his uncle stood by the wheel, the dog curled up on the deck forward. The *Sarepta's* engine coughed and banged and they threaded the channel and emerged upon the great ocean beyond the outer beach.

It seemed to the boy that they were going on and on, forever. The land they had left dropped lower and lower, it was soon merely a vague, indefinite smudge behind them. The long ground swell lifted the *Sarepta* to a crest only to drop her to a valley. The sun rose from behind the cloud bank and the water turned from a green to a light blue. And still they went on, straight out to sea, out—and out.

John Heath spoke almost not at all. He stood by the wheel, pulling at his pipe, and looking, not so much at the water ahead as at the passenger in the cockpit. Raymond noticed the scrutiny. It seemed to him that each time he glanced up at his uncle's face he found it turned in his direction. It made him a trifle uneasy; he had never seen anybody who watched a fellow the way this man did. He shifted under the stare.

"Feel all right?" asked Heath, who noticed the shift.

"Yes, sir."

"How do you like it so far?"

"Fine!"

"Be there pretty soon."

"There," so far as Raymond could see, was just like here, or anywhere else. Nothing in sight but water, water pushing itself up and letting itself down, and looking exactly alike, no matter in which direction he gazed.

"How do you know?" he asked, involuntarily.

"Know what?"

"Where to go."

"Been here afore. Look aft there."

Raymond did not know what "aft" might mean, but he looked in the direction toward which his uncle pointed.

"See that steeple yonder?"

Beyond the low line of beach, the land they had left was developing in the sunlight. The shapeless brown smudge was taking on form and color. Low hills, green, with patches of deeper green here and there. Tiny white houses showed, and above them, a sharp white spire, like a toothpick set on end.

"That's the Nauticook meetin'house. Now look over there to port. See that little house up on the high land?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's the life-savin' station at Jessup's Point. Now what we've got to do is bring 'em into line. Notice I'm swingin' her broadside on. Now when that steeple and that station come one right in front of the other, you sing out, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

The *Sarepta* slowed down. Her beam was now almost parallel with the distant shore. Raymond's eyes were fixed upon the spire. The little building on the high point was pushing itself steadily toward it.

"It's in front now," he cried, excitedly.

"Sure enough! And here we are."

The anchor at the stern went over with a splash. Heath went forward and lowered its mate at the bow. The engine stopped; the boat lay quiet moored fore and aft.

"Now," observed her owner, "we'll see if the fish are home or gone to campmeetin'."

He brought out three lines, twined on wooden reels. He baited the big hook at the end of one with a "wrinkle" and handed the reel to the boy.

"Let it out till the sinker hits bottom," he directed. "Then haul it up just the least little mite."

Raymond tried to obey orders.

"It's awful deep, isn't it?" he said.

"Ninety foot, or thereabouts. You're about right, ain't you? Yes," testing the line, "you're just off bottom. Let it stay there."

"Yes, sir. What shall I do next?"

"Fish."

"Yes, Uncle John. How will I know when I get a bite? . . . Gee!" excitedly; "I think I've got one now! What shall I do?"

"Haul."

"Haul" was the word. Raymond hauled—and hauled. He braced a foot against the edge of the bench and tugged with all his might. The wet line came in inch by inch. The boy's arms ached and the perspiration ran down his nose, but he fought manfully. John Heath watched him with a grim smile.

"Want me to help you?" he asked.

"No!"

The ninety feet began to seem like ninety miles before, through the green water, a struggling shape became dimly visible. Raymond saw it.

"There he is! There he is!" he panted. "Oh, isn't he a whopper!"

Heath picked up a short pole with an iron hook at the end of it and leaned over the side. Another moment and the cod, skillfully gaffed, was lifted into the cockpit. Raymond gazed at it triumphantly.

"Gee! What a fish!" he crowed.

"Pretty fair. About twelve pound or so. . . . Well, are you tired? Want to rest a spell?"

"No, sir."

"Don't, eh? What do you want to do?"

"Fish."

They fished, and, as the fishing was good that morning, they were kept busy. The big box amidships was soon half

filled with cod, haddock and hake. Raymond caught several of these, but he lost quite as many as he landed. Then the bites became fewer. The sun was well overhead by now and, as the breeze was still very light, the heat was almost oppressive. The *Sarepta* rolled and lifted and slid on the long, oily swells. The passenger began to resent these lifts and slides; also he was increasingly conscious that the boat, so far as perfume was concerned, was no flower garden.

Heath, still watching him intently, asked another question.

"How do you feel now?"

"Oh—oh, all right."

"Uh-hm. Want to quit and lie down a spell?"

"No, sir."

He was obliged to quit a few minutes later, but, when the paroxysm was over, he turned again to his line.

"Better give it up, don't you think?"

"No. I'd rather fish."

By noon the box was two-thirds full. Heath pulled in his line and went forward to the cabin, returning with the lunch box, the coffee bottle and two tin cups.

"How about grub?" he asked gravely.

Raymond tried hard to repress a shudder. He turned his back upon the eatables.

"I—I don't think I'm hungry," he said.

"No? Too bad. Well, you curl up on the thwart there while I eat. Wind's goin' to freshen pretty soon and you'll feel better."

But Raymond shook his head.

"If—if you don't mind," he said, "I think I'd rather keep on fishing."

"You had? Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. When I'm fishing I—I kind of forget."

John Heath smiled. He laid a hand on the youngster's shoulder.

"Just as you say, boy," he observed, and his tone was less gruff than usual. "We'll call it a day and head for home, if you'd rather."

Raymond shook his head. "The box isn't full yet," he said doggedly.

It was full, or nearly so, by one o'clock. The breeze, in accordance with the Heath prophecy, was growing steadily stronger. The *Sarepta* no longer climbed and coasted; now she jumped and danced. The change of motion was a pleasant one; the cool wind, too, was refreshing. Raymond began to feel distinctly happier. Even the thought of food was not as overwhelmingly repellent.

John Heath rose to his feet and, going forward, began to pull at the rope in the bow. His passenger turned to look.

"Are we going home?" he asked, in surprise.

"Cal'late to."

"But I feel lots better; honest I do!"

"Glad of it." He made the rope fast and turned to the one over the stern.

"Uncle John—"

"Eh? Yes?"

"We haven't caught all the fish, have we? There's room for more in the box."

"We've caught enough. Pretty average day's work."

"If I hadn't been sick I'd have caught lots more, I bet. I'm sorry."

"That's all right. For a green hand you've caught your share. Now, old gal," addressing the *Sarepta's* engine, "come to. Show us some signs of life."

The signs of life were rather feeble at first and, as usual, there were several cessations during the voyage home; but Raymond was feeling steadily better as the boat plowed through the water, and the cool wind on his forehead helped the cure. His spirits rose, he became almost talkative.

John Heath, too, talked a good deal, for him. He asked questions; they were roundabout questions, never blunt or pointed, but they dealt with his "nephew's" life in Coleville, his school, his interests, the things he liked or did not like. He asked no questions concerning the boy's mother and when the lad referred to her, he always changed the subject.

The motor boat drew up at the little pier below the cottage. Jack, who had had an unusually dull day—neither his master nor the passenger had paid much attention to him—jumped ashore and rushed, barking, up the slope. Heath turned to the boy.

"Here we are in port," he observed. "Glad enough to be here, too, I guess, ain't you?"

"Yes, sir. But I want to go again."

"Eh? Do, eh? Hmph!"

"Yes, Uncle John. Maybe I wouldn't be sick next time."

"Can't tell; you might be."

"If I kept on going I wouldn't be after a while, would I?"

"Hope not."

"*May* I go again?"

"Sure!" heartily. "Here comes the chief cook and bottle-washer. Hey, Lo! got anything to eat handy around the house? This young fellow can use it, if you have, I shouldn't wonder."

That evening Mr. Weeks demanded to be told about the day's cruise.

"Raymond was feelin' kind of how-come-you-so off there on the grounds, wa'n't he?" he suggested, with a chuckle. "He didn't have much to say about it, but I pumped him and he owned up that he wasn't too comf'table there one spell."

"Sick as a dog."

"Poor young one! Well, I know how he felt, I been there myself. There's times when I can't go out on salt water even now without realizin' I was born with a stomach. That's funny, ain't it?"

"Be funnier if you'd been born without one. . . . Lo, I tell you one thing that boy's got, besides a stomach."

"Hey? What's that?"

"Grit."

CHAPTER VI

RAYMOND, during the next two weeks, made several trips to the fishing grounds in company with his uncle. Heath went out every day, of course, but he did not always invite the boy to go with him. On rainy or blowy days he and Jack went alone and Raymond was left ashore in Lorenzo's charge. He accompanied the cook up town on errands to the shops and to the post office and thus began to learn a little of Nauticook and its inhabitants. At this season of the year, late August, it was a busy place, and at mail time the sidewalk before the post office was crowded with vacationists, young and old.

After Labor Day, so Lorenzo told him, there would be a decided change.

"You'd think," vowed Weeks, "that the town had been struck with smallpox or somethin', the way the city gang pack up and clear out. By the first of October there won't be nary one of 'em left. Every last place that ain't what might be called permanent will be shut up tight."

"The Inn and all?" asked Raymond, to whom that expensively select hostelry had been pointed out with reverential awe.

"Yes, siree! Labor Day comes on a Monday and Wednesday the Inn puts up the shutters."

Raymond thought it over. At least seven-eighths of the crowd surrounding them were obviously summer sojourners. He tried to imagine what the place would be like without them.

"Gee, it must be awful lonesome!" he said, involuntarily, "with everybody gone."

Lorenzo laid a hand on his shoulder. "Boy," he said, with impressive emphasis, "don't you worry about that. Everybody ain't goin' to be gone. There'll be enough of us left to keep things runnin' right. All this—er—soapsuds," with a scornful wave of the hand toward the nearest of the white-flanneled, sports-costumed groups surrounding them, "will clear out, but the reg'lar solid folks like the selectmen and the minister and the doctor and—er—Cap'n Bailey Briggs and—well, me and your uncle—the kind of folks that count, I mean—we'll stay right here. Nobody couldn't coax us to go nowhere else."

"Couldn't they?" rather doubtfully.

"No, siree, they couldn't! Money couldn't hire us to do it. Nauticook is the finest town of its size in the United States. I've lived here all my life and I know what I'm talking about."

Raymond considered for another minute.

"Uncle John has lived somewhere else, hasn't he?" he asked.

"We-ll—" reluctantly, "yes, he has. It wasn't his fault though; his ma took him away when he was little and he couldn't help himself. But he came back here, you'll notice. He's livin' here now and here he's cal'latin' to die, you can bet on that."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why will it make him die?"

"*Make* him! We've all got to die sometime or other, ain't we?"

"But you said he was calculating to do it."

"There, there! I can't waste time talkin' about dyin', out here in the middle of the road. The mail's sorted; let's get it."

It did not take long for as sharp a lad as Raymond Condon to realize that Lorenzo Weeks, in spite of his own classifica-

tion of himself as one of Nauticook's solid citizens, was not accepted as such by the townspeople. It seemed to the boy that Lorenzo was more or less of a joke in the community. What he said—and he said a great deal on any or all occasions—was accepted lightly and answered in kind. And he was just as quick to notice that his uncle John Heath, was treated and regarded differently. He was merely a "boat fisherman" and every one called him by his Christian name, or "Hi" but, although the actual sea captains, the storekeepers, or the summer visitors laughed with him, they seldom laughed at him.

Usually, in the evenings after supper, Heath went up to the village and generally Raymond was invited to come along. Once they dropped in at the Sheet Anchor Club, John explaining briefly that he wished to see a man who was likely to be there.

The room—the club rented and occupied but one—was thick with tobacco smoke. There were four card tables where games of whist, euchre or "hearts" were being played, and about each table was a group of onlookers, noisy and hilarious or quiet and solemn, according to the progress of the games. Heath's entrance with his young protégé was quietly made and the pair were not noticed for the moment. Raymond gazed about him. His first impression was that no one present, save himself, was less than forty years old; his second that, judged by their clothes and manner of speech, there were no summer sojourners among them.

John Heath looked the gathering over. Then, followed by the boy, he walked across the room to one of the two whist tables. An elderly man, red-faced, bearded, spectacled, and important, was solemnly considering the cards he was holding. It obviously was his turn to play and he was just as obviously not certain what that play should be. His partner, across the table, another red-faced and pompous individual, was fidgeting with impatience.

"Well, well, Ben," he sputtered, after a moment, "what are you layin' to so long for now? It's your play, isn't it? Get under way, for the Lord sakes!"

His *vis-à-vis* selected a card, regarded it thoughtfully, and then put it back with the others in his hand.

"It's my play when I feel like playing, Bailey," he replied, with dignity. "And just when I so feel is my own business. . . . Hmph! spades are trumps and Joe here has got the ace."

The player at his left looked up in surprise.

"How do you know what I've got in my hand?" he demanded, with indignation.

"Saw it over your shoulder, of course. If you'd learn to hold your cards up against your vest, same as I do, you and Josiah would make more points. . . . Eh? Oh, hello, Hi! Don't bother me now. I'm just figuring whether to lick these fellows in a hurry or have the fun of watching 'em squirm a little longer."

Heath smiled, but he did not move.

"Want to see you a minute, Cap'n Benijah," he said, quietly.

"Soon's this hand's over."

"Won't be but a jiffy."

"Hmph! Can't you wait that jiffy as well as I can?"

"Guess not."

"I guess you'll have to. . . . Say, look here, are you going to keep on bothering me like this?"

"Um-hm."

Captain Benijah slapped his cards face down upon the table. He rose to his feet.

"By the great and holy!" he exclaimed, testily. "No wonder you catch cod, Hi Heath. You stick around till the fish get sick of seeing the hook and bite so's to get rid of you. Well, what do you want?"

"Come over here and I'll tell you. Wait where you are, Raymond; I'll be back in a minute."

He and the big man moved over to a corner of the room where they whispered together for a brief interval. Raymond noticed that Captain Benijah turned to look in his direction several times during the interview. The other players at the whist table began to ask questions.

"You're Hi Heath's nephew ain't you, sonny?" inquired the man called Joe.

"Yes, sir."

"Been living out West somewheres, I understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"I see. Going to stay here in Nauticook a while now?"

"Yes, sir, I guess so."

The player called Bailey took up the catechizing.

"How long you going to stay?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir."

"What was your father's name?"

"Ralph Condon."

"Condon, eh? Was it him or your mother then was relation to Hi?"

"Mother, I think."

"What was her name before she was married?"

"Mother's name was Ella."

"Yes, yes, sartin. I don't mean her first name. I mean—"

Heath and his companion had returned by this time and he interrupted here.

"Sorry to hold up your game, Cap'n Bailey," he said. "Come on, Raymond."

Outside the club room he and the boy walked on in silence for a short distance. Then said Heath: "Workin' the pumps a little, was they, Raymond?"

"What, Uncle John?"

"Askin' you a few things?"

"Yes, sir."

"Um-hm; shouldn't wonder. About where you hail from,

and who your folks were and how long you cal'lated to stay with me, eh?"

"Yes, Uncle John."

"What did you tell 'em?"

"Why—why, when they asked me how long I was going to stay, I said I didn't know. I don't, do I, Uncle John?"

"No. . . . Well, boy, the next time anybody asks you any of those questions you keep on sayin' you don't know, will you?"

"Why—why, yes, sir. Only—"

"Only what?"

"I do know some of the things."

"Maybe; but *they* don't need to. When they ask you just say 'Don't know' and if they keep on askin' tell 'em I said they could ask me. Do that, will you?"

"Yes, Uncle John. But why?"

"Just for fun. Notice that big fellow with the specs, the one I had backed up in the corner? Uh-hm. Well, he's Cap'n Benijah Simpson, of the school committee in this town."

"You and he were talking about me, weren't you, Uncle John?"

"Eh? . . . How did you know that?"

"I saw him looking at me while you were talking."

"Hm! Is that so! Nothin' the matter with your eyes, young fellow. Yes, we did talk about you, here and there."

"Why?"

"Tell you that pretty soon. Let's go home now. Jack'll begin to think the ship's sinkin' and we've took to the boats and left him."

Another evening's excursion Raymond made with Mr. Weeks. John Heath said he was busy, had a few letters to write and guessed he would not go "up street." If the boy wished to go, if he was not too tired—it had been one of the days spent on the fishing grounds and Raymond proudly an-

nounced on his return that he had not been sick the least bit —he might go with Lorenzo.

"Don't let Lo get into trouble, Raymond," he added, as the pair were about to leave the cottage. "Keep a weather eye on him."

Weeks, always the dependable Dr. Watson, gasped in resentful amazement. "Trouble!" he repeated. "What kind of trouble do you cal'late I could get into in this town, for salvation's sakes?"

"Can't tell. A man freightin' your load of wickedness is liable to run afoul of trouble most anywhere."

"Huh? What do you mean by that? Who said I was wicked?"

"Why, you. You brag about it. All right, Raymond; if he gets frisky you just sing out 'Sin' and that'll fetch him up all standin'."

"More mush talk! What kind of a hard ticket do you figger this young-one'll begin to think I be? By godfreys mighty, Hi Heath—"

"Tut, tut! Time they sent you another tract. Better stop in at the post office."

For some time after leaving the cottage Lorenzo Weeks was in a disgruntled mood, muttering to himself, and seldom addressing his young companion. After the call at the post office where—to Lorenzo's relief, or so it seemed to Raymond—the box contained no mail matter whatever, he became more cheerful.

"Ain't sleepy yet, are you, sonny?" he asked. Raymond declared that he was not in the least sleepy.

"That's good. Then we won't go home right off. Let's walk around a spell. What do you say?"

They walked. It was a pleasant evening, and Main Street —the main road, Weeks always called it—was dotted throughout its length with groups and couples of laughing and talking young people on their way to the town hall

where, so Lorenzo said, there was to be some kind of a "time," a dance, he believed.

"Are we going there?" asked Raymond, innocently.

"What? To a dancin' time? I guess *not!* Dancin's an invention of the Evil One; didn't you know that?"

The boy had not known it until then, but he made no comment. Lorenzo went on; he became reminiscent.

"No, siree," he vowed, "I don't take you to nothin' of that kind! And I don't take myself there neither. Time was, though, when I used to love dancin'. And I was spry on my feet, too—all hands, girls and all, used to tell me so. I remember one Thanksgivin' Ball when I never got home till—"

He broke off in the middle of the sentence, glanced at his young companion, and added, hastily:

"That was a long spell ago, of course; I'm ashamed of it now. Oh!" with elaborate surprise, "I declare if we ain't walked way down pretty nigh to the Neck. And here's the Bethel. Come to think of it, I recollect there's a meetin' to-night. Let's go in a few minutes; it'll rest our feet, if nothin' more."

The Come-Outer Bethel was a little gray-shingled building sitting close to the road, with a board walk leading up to its door and a pine grove at its rear. Inside, or so Raymond thought, it was not at all attractive. The service was already well under way and they entered on tiptoe and sat down on a hard wooden settee near the back wall.

A man behind the little pulpit on the platform was preaching and doing so more enthusiastically than any minister the boy had ever before heard—or seen. He waved his arms, rose on tiptoe and sank back almost to his knees, and his voice rose and fell with the rest of him. What he said was not, to the lad, especially interesting and his attention soon wandered. He began to look about him at the men and women scattered along the other settees.

There were no summer visitors here, that was certain. Nor—with the exception of Mr. Weeks himself—none of the solid, substantial element, the class to which the cook had proudly boasted he and Uncle John belonged. These people were different. There were more women than men and, although they were obviously dressed in their best clothes, they did not—the men especially—look comfortable in them. So far Raymond was sympathetic. He could easily remember when he, too, hated to "dress up."

But the clothes were the least of their peculiarities. They not only looked odd, but they behaved that way. When the preacher's shout was especially loud and he paused—for breath, it seemed—the congregation, a portion of it, shouted in response. "Amen!" "Hallelujah!" "Glory!" "Send the power!" There was a small man sitting next to Raymond who had a disconcerting habit of groaning, and of doing it at most unexpected times. He did not wait for the minister to finish a sentence; he groaned in the middle of it.

For such a little man he had an astonishingly deep voice and his "O-ohs" and "A-h-hs" boomed as if they came from the bottom of a well. He sounded as if he were in agony, but he looked as if he were having a good time. On a settee further toward the front sat a large woman, with a black hat ornamented with a red quill. Raymond noticed that this woman turned her head frequently to look in the direction of himself and Mr. Weeks. Each time she did so the latter squirmed. After a time he, too, began to groan and shout. Raymond wished to ask questions, but he decided not to do so.

The sermon ended after a time—a long time—and the congregation sang a hymn. Then they sang another and another. Then the minister announced that all would be glad to hear from those who had the call to speak. Several had it. Most of what they had to say was, to Raymond, incomprehensible. One old man was more interesting than the rest

because he spoke of the perils of the deep and drifting on a lee shore and shortening sail and casting anchor in a safe port. After each of these little speeches the large woman with the black hat turned and gazed toward them and each time she did so Mr. Weeks squirmed and fidgeted.

At last the benediction was pronounced. Raymond expected—and hoped—that Lorenzo and he might go home now. They did start for the door, but their progress was impeded by people who crowded about to shake hands and talk. Practically every one of these was interested in him, the boy, and they asked questions, similar questions to those asked by the members of the Sheet Anchor Club. Mindful of his uncle's instructions, most of Raymond's answers were of the "don't know" variety. Somewhat to his surprise Mr. Weeks did not seem to know much more than he did.

And then, just as they were about to pass through the door, the black-hatted woman pushed her way in front of them. She was even taller and wider and more majestic on her feet than she had appeared to be when sitting.

"Why, good evenin', Mr. Weeks," she said. "It *is* you, ain't it! I couldn't hardly believe my eyes. You're quite a stranger."

Her voice was as majestic as the rest of her. Her tone was cordial, but Lorenzo seemed to detect a trace of sarcasm in it. He wiggled.

"How d'ye do, Huldy?" he stammered. "Yes—yes, it's me. Real movin' meetin', wa'n't it?"

"I'm glad if it seemed that way to you. We—some of us—had begun to think you was losin' interest. You haven't gathered with us for pretty nigh a fortni't."

"Well—well, you see I've been pretty busy up to the house. Had consider'ble to do. Er—Huldy—this is Raymond Condon; he's Hi's nephew from out West. Raymond, shake hands with Mrs. Bascom."

Mrs. Bascom smiled graciously. "How do you do, little

man?" she said, thereby inscribing her name forever upon Raymond's black list; at his age to be addressed as "little man" is an unforgivable insult. He returned the how do you do, but he added nothing to it.

"I am happy to see that Mr. Weeks brought you to our meetin'," the lady went on. "Or," with another smile, and a glance in Lorenzo's direction, "perhaps it was you that brought him? Was it now?"

"No, ma'am," gloomily.

"Well, I didn't know. He is *such* a stranger! Our little band does its best to keep the lamp bright and burnin' and the door is always open. Of course, if folks don't *want* to come, if the ways of darkness appeal to 'em more, if the confessions of worldly sin we've all heard are just soundin' brass and tinklin' cymbals, why—well, then they can stay away, I presume likely. Broad is the way leadin' to destruction: we've all been told that often enough, haven't we?"

Raymond had not the least idea what the lady meant. There were lamps in the Bethel, but the references to a band and cymbals were confusing. The only musical instrument in evidence was a tin-panny piano. However, as her remarks seemed to be addressed to him, he again said, "Yes, ma'am."

Mr. Weeks appeared to understand very well.

"Now don't talk that way, Huldy," he protested. "You know I like to come to meetin' here first-rate. Do, every chance I get."

"Not that it makes any worldly difference to me who comes or stays. Far as I am concerned, them that have drifted from Congregational to Methodist, and from the land knows where afore that, can keep on driftin', if it suits 'em better. I had hoped—we all had hoped—Ah, well! . . . It's been a nice day, Mr. Weeks, hasn't it? *Good* evenin'."

She was turning away, but Lorenzo detained her.

"Hold on, Huldy, won't you?" he begged. "I'm cal'latin'

to be on hand pretty reg'lar from now on. Yes, I am so. This is the last time Mr. Colquit's goin' to preach for us, I understand. Too bad, I'd like to hear him all the time. Don't suppose there'll be another meetin' for quite a spell, though, eh?"

"There will be a social gatherin' in this Bethel next Saturday night. A short song service with ice cream and cake afterwards. You might tell whoever's interested that tickets to the ice cream and cake part are twenty-five cents apiece. I've got some to sell, myself—in case anybody wants to know. . . . Not that it's likely they will."

The Weeks hand sought the Weeks pocket.

"I'll take one of them tickets right now, Huldy," he announced, with unction.

"Oh, thank you! How many did you say? I didn't quite catch."

"I said—I said—Well, I'll take a couple. Maybe I can get rid of the other one somewheres."

"Don't take 'em if you don't want to. Considerin' the amount of money some people spend for—oh, tobacco and such sinful wastes, an extra quarter ain't much to lay out for good singin', with a saucer of ice cream thrown in. As for the cake—well, I'm plannin' to make one of my Washin'ton pies, and I *think* I've heard you say you liked them."

"You bet! . . . Well, come on, Raymond; we've got to be goin'."

Mrs. Bascom and Raymond shook hands once more. So, too, did she and Mr. Weeks.

"Good night, Lorenzo," she said, more graciously. Then she added, with a sudden and, to Raymond, most unexpected gush of sentiment: "You poor lonesome, strugglin' soul! We all of us realize the temptations you have to fight against, livin' with—with scoffers and them that speak vain things. If you only knew how some of us sympathize—Oh well!

I'll save a piece of my Washin'ton pie for you Saturday night. *Good*-by."

Lorenzo said little during the walk home. Several times Raymond noticed that he took his pipe from his pocket, but each time he neither filled nor lighted it. Instead he fingered it, longingly it seemed, and put it back in his pocket.

Heath had retired when the pair returned home, and the next morning, when Raymond came downstairs, he had gone, in the *Sarepta,* to the fishing grounds. But that evening when he and the boy were alone together, he asked questions. Lorenzo having been sent on an errand to the drug store, had departed, puffing clouds of tobacco smoke. His low spirits had vanished and his temporary aversion to the pipe with them.

"You and Lo have a good time up street last night?" inquired Heath.

Raymond scarcely knew how to answer. He did not wish to appear ungrateful to Mr. Weeks who, several times during the day, had assured him that he had only taken him into the Bethel because he thought he might like the music.

"Why, pretty good, Uncle John," he said.

"Um-hm. Where'd you go?"

Raymond told him.

"Um-hm. Yes, yes. Had a new out-of-town minister fillin' in up there for a couple of weeks, I understand. Good preacher, was he?"

"Why— I guess so."

"Could hear him without much trouble?"

"Yes, sir."

"Shouldn't wonder. Seems to be the Come-Outer notion that the Almighty is deaf. Meet any of the folks there?"

"Yes, Uncle John, a few."

"Who?"

The only name Raymond could remember was that of Mrs. Bascom. Heath seemed quietly amused.

"What did you think of Huldy?" he asked.

"Why—why, I don't know. She's awful big, isn't she?"

"She hasn't shrunk any in the wash, that's a fact. She and Lo pretty sociable, were they?"

"She talked to him."

"*To* him is right, I guess likely. What did she say?"

Raymond repeated as much of the Bascom discourse as he could remember. His Uncle John nodded.

"Hmph!" he mused, "I guess she's the answer. Don't believe there's much doubt of it."

"What, sir?"

"Eh? Oh, nothin'. I was thinkin' about tracts. . . . Hmph! So he's goin' to be fed on Washin'ton pie Saturday night. Asked you to go and feed with him, has he?"

"Why, he said I could go if I wanted to."

"Do you?"

"Not very much."

"Then don't," crisply. "If Lo says any more to you about it, turn him over to me."

He took a book from the table and turned its pages. Raymond tried to find something of interest in the *Weekly Item*, but did not succeed. Happening to look up, he noticed that his uncle was reading no longer, but was regarding him with a sort of troubled intentness.

"All nothin'," said Heath, suddenly.

"What, Uncle John?"

"That Come-Outer gang. They're all right of their kind, maybe, but they're all talk and no do. Steer clear of 'em."

"Yes, sir." Then, with manly nonchalance, "I don't care much about church anyway, Uncle John. I'd rather go fishing Sundays, same as you do."

"Hmph!" The Heath brows drew together. "I see. . . . Use to go to meetin' out there in Coleville, did you?"

"Sometimes—with mother. She—"

He paused and looked down at the paper in his lap. John

Heath, too, was silent for a few minutes. Then he asked, more gently: "You used to go once in a while, eh?"

"Yes. And I 'most always went to Sunday school."

"I see. . . . Um-hm. I hadn't thought of that. The Congregationalist folks run a pretty good Sunday school, from what I hear. You can go there, if you want to. . . . Yes," slowly, "I don't know as you hadn't better."

Raymond did not receive the suggestion with enthusiasm. His uncle crossed his knees and waited for him to speak.

"Well?" he prompted. "You don't act as if you was givin' three cheers. What's the matter?"

The boy shifted in his chair.

"Sunday school is just for kids," he muttered rebelliously.

"Oh, yes, yes! I keep forgettin' that you're grown up. Rather go to reg'lar church, had you?"

Another rebellious wriggle. "I'd rather go fishing with you, same as I said. You go Sundays, same as every day; Lorenzo told me so."

"Did, eh? Have a few remarks to make about it?"

The question was accompanied by a smile, so Raymond smiled, too.

"He said you were a heathen, but I didn't pay any attention."

"He might be right, at that. I don't know what I am, most of the time, seems so. I know what I ain't, but that doesn't get me very far. You, though—that's different."

He tugged thoughtfully at his mustache. Raymond ventured another protest.

"I don't see why I have to go to church," he declared, "I'd lots rather not. Fishing is fun, and I don't believe I'll be sick any more, honest I don't. I like to go out with you, Uncle John. I like to do what you do."

"Hmph! Do what I do, eh? Well, boy, that's pretty nigh exactly what I don't want you to do. . . . No," emphatically, "nor be, either."

"Why? I'm only going to stay here a little while. I can go to church when I'm back home. I can't fish there—not and catch real fish, I mean."

"Hmph! . . . Raymond, suppose I told you you might be liable to stay longer than a little while? Suppose I said you might be goin' to stay here right along? How'd you like that?"

Raymond was astonished.

"Stay here—always?" he cried. "Not go back to Coleville at all?"

"Um-hm."

"*Live* here, you mean? With you, Uncle John?"

"With me and Lorenzo and Nuisance—yes."

The lad could scarcely believe the suggestion a serious one. He considered.

"I—I guess I should like it—pretty well," he said, doubtfully.

"Only pretty well, eh?"

"Why—are there any other boys here; any that stay all the time, I mean?"

"Sure! Plenty of 'em. If you went to school, reg'lar day school, you'd get to know lots of boys—and girls too. There's a baseball team in summer, and lots of things like that."

"Would I have to go to *school?*"

"Don't you want to?"

"I'd rather go fishing."

John Heath's manner and tone became more serious. He leaned forward.

"Boy," he said, earnestly, "you said somethin' just now about wantin' to do what I did and I said that was about what I didn't want. Fishin's all right—for a rough and tough customer like me—but when you grow up you won't be satisfied to be nothin' but a boat fisherman; anyhow, I hope you won't. You can go out in the *Sarepta* with me

Saturdays, and maybe once in a while of a Sunday, if you want to; but most Sundays, for a spell anyhow, I guess likely you'd better go to Sunday school; you'll find plenty there your own age and older. And every week day *but* Saturday you must go to school and study—yes, you must. You remember, up at the club, my talkin' about you with Cap'n Benije Simpson, and my sayin' he was chairman of the School Committee?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Benije is fixin' it so that you'll start in to school the mornin' after Labor Day. . . . There, there, youngster, don't look so down in the mouth. The ship ain't sinkin' yet; she ain't even sprung a leak. You'll get to know a whole lot of boys and girls and you'll have good times, see if you don't. . . . Here, here! you ain't cryin', are you?"

"No. . . . No, Uncle John," miserably.

"You mustn't. Boys that are grown-up enough to haul in ten-pound codfish don't cry. . . . What is it? Homesick, kind of?"

"I—I was thinking about—about mother. I wish she—Oh, dear!"

He broke down utterly and, forgetful of manhood and pride, sobbed wretchedly, his head upon his arms on the back of the chair. John Heath was greatly disturbed. He rose and laid his hand upon the bowed head.

"Tough luck, old man," he said, his own voice not too clear. "Tough enough! Wish I could help you that way, but I can't. I'll do my best to help you other ways, though —by the Lord, I will! . . . Come on, now. This library book's a pretty good yarn; about fishin' up on the Banks 'tis. A fellow named Kipling wrote it. . . . Come on, let's read it together. I'll read to you a spell and then you can read to me. . . . Can read, can't you?"

"Course I can!" indignantly.

"Sure! . . . Well, what do you say?"

The next day the two trunks containing Raymond's clothes and belongings arrived from Coleville. Mindful of Heath's rigid orders Mr. Coxley had sent nothing which had been the personal property of Ella Condon. Lorenzo Weeks asked numberless questions concerning the contents of those trunks. His employer's replies were far from satisfactory. A letter from the Coleville minister came the same day, but of its contents Heath divulged absolutely nothing.

Lorenzo's suspicions, however, were aroused. They continued to grow. On the morning of Tuesday, the day following the holiday, Heath did not go out in the *Sarepta.* Instead, about half-past eight, he and Raymond went up town together, and from that excursion John Heath returned alone.

"Why—where's Raymond?" demanded Weeks. "What did you do with him?"

"He's in school, I left him there."

"School! . . . Do you mean—Say, is he goin' to stay there?"

"Stay till noontime. He'll be home for dinner."

"And then? . . . Will he go back again?"

"Um-hm."

"Well, my salvation's sins! . . . Look here, Hi Heath, do you mean to say that boy's goin' to school right along now —reg'lar?"

"Yes."

The Weeks suspicions, having come to a boil, overflowed.

"I knew it!" he declared, vehemently. "When the trunks came I as good as guessed it, and now I know. . . . Hi Heath, you know what I think?"

"Didn't know you thought."

"Well, I do, and I'm doin' it right now. I think that boy's goin' to stay here with us all the time. I think you've adopted him."

John Heath smiled faintly.

"So that's what you think; eh, Lo?" he observed.
"Yes, sir, that's just what I think."
"All right. Go ahead."
"Go *ahead!* Go ahead—what?"
"Go ahead and think."

CHAPTER VII

LORENZO WEEKS had a stock of wise sayings upon which he was in the habit of drawing at frequent intervals. They were not original with him, having been ancient and threadbare in the time of his grandparents, and their grandparents before them; but Lorenzo had the habit of tossing one of them into a conversation with a sort of impressive finality.

When he said: "Well, it's a small world, after all"; or "There's some things the Almighty never meant man to know"; or "It don't pay to be too sure in this life"; the listener was conscious of a sort of "That settles it" in the tone, implying that Mr. Weeks considered the matter closed.

One of these philosophical sledge hammers which he used to drive the final nail in an argument was: "A whole lot can happen in a year." It was not disputed, because it was true. A whole lot can happen in a year—even in Nauticook. And in seven years a whole lot more. During the seven years following Raymond Condon's arrival in the village much happened. At the end of that period Seven-up and its inhabitants had changed considerably.

To begin with the cottage itself: that had changed greatly. It had grown. The little five-room "shack" had become a fair-sized house. Another wing, with a dining room and new kitchen on the first floor and a spare bedroom on the second, had been added. There was a porch on the side facing the bay and harbor. The kerosene lamps had been replaced by electric lights; when the power company in New Bedford extended its service to and through Nauticook a

number of the town's citizens installed wiring and fixtures and John Heath was one of that number.

The pump in the living room had gone, of course, and, in the new kitchen, Lorenzo now drew water from a faucet, that water being forced from a pressure tank in the woodshed by a small gasoline-driven motor.

The *Sarepta* was still in commission, but she had a new engine, and a fresh coat of paint each spring. The odor of fish was not as pervasive aboard her as of old, for the reason that she no longer made daily trips to the Razor Bank. John Heath, when he fished nowadays, did so for pleasure and not for profit. He was now, not a boat fisherman, but a cabinetmaker and a dealer in old furniture, with a shop and showroom on the main road about a quarter mile from the post office. During the busy summer months he employed an assistant in the shop. He was making a good living and, so wiseacres opined, putting by money.

All these changes and the increasing prosperity had come gradually, of course. A few of Nauticook's prominent citizens, Captain Benijah Simpson for one, gave the credit to John Heath, himself. "A smart fellow, Hi is," declared Cap'n Benije. "Queer as a six-toed tomcat with a bobtail, but smart, just the same. I saw that from the time he first landed here, and I said so, didn't I? 'That fellow's going to get ahead in the world,' that's what I said; and, if you're honest, you'll own up to hearing me say it."

A majority of his hearers did so "own up," for the sufficient reason that it was always polite to agree with Captain Benijah; but Nauticook in general, credited the improvement in John Heath's worldly affairs to his nephew, Raymond Condon. "It's that boy that did it," Captain Bailey Briggs asserted. "Before he came Hi was just shiftless and easy-going and don't-care. It wasn't until after that nephew of his started to live with him that he woke up and commenced to make money. 'Twas Raymond that was responsible. He

is a clever boy and, from what Lo Weeks says, he'd been used to living different than the way they lived at Seven-up. He put a flea in his uncle's ear, you can bet, and Hi took a tumble to himself. That's the answer to it. Hi Heath's done well, but you've got to hand it to Raymond."

Of the three at Seven-up—not counting Nuisance, who was now an old, sedate and rheumatic dog—Raymond had changed most of all. He had shot into the air and widened in proportion. Now, in his final year at the Orham high school, he was, although not tall for his years, broad-shouldered and good-looking. It was in athletics that he shone. He was first baseman on the ball nine and captain and full back of the school eleven. He was popular with his fellows and particularly so with the girls. If his teachers had any fault to find with him, it was that he preferred a good time to hard work. He was, however, quick at his studies, when he chose to apply himself.

Next in importance to the changes in Raymond, were the changes in John Heath. Not so much in his appearance. He looked very much as he used, except that the hair at his temples was grayer. He still dressed carelessly and he was, for the greater part of the time, as taciturn as ever. He was, perhaps, a trifle less heedless in his speech, using fewer "ain't no's" and differentiating more carefully in his choice of "them" and "those."

The really great change was in his awakened ambition, his desire to earn and save money. This change had begun even while he still went "boat fishing." He made longer stays on the fishing grounds and an indifferent catch was no longer a matter of indifference to him. Lorenzo noticed that he was more particular concerning the receipt of the checks from the wholesale fish dealers in Boston and New York, and if there was any marked delay in these remittances he spoke of it, something he never used to do. He made his own deposits in the bank instead of sending them by Weeks,

and he did a good deal of figuring in the evenings, after Raymond had gone to bed.

Lorenzo Weeks was—he often said so—one of the "noticing" kind. Therefore he continued to notice and it was not long before he decided that the reason for his employer's sudden interest in money and business was his interest in this new nephew. John Heath was even then becoming more and more devoted to the boy. He talked with him about his school work, about the friends he was making among the Nauticook juveniles, walked up town almost every evening with him, neglecting the Sheet Anchor Club practically altogether.

He was more careful of the household bills and of his own expenditures. In the old days he usually kept a box of cigars on hand, for Sunday and evening smoking. Now, when he smoked, it was always a pipe. But, to offset this sudden parsimony, he gave Raymond a dollar a week for pocket money—a much more liberal allowance than that afforded most Nauticook boys—and was very particular concerning his appearance and wardrobe. One Saturday afternoon in early November he accompanied the lad to a school football game. Raymond did not play, of course, he was but twelve at the time, but he was tremendously interested. After the game was over and they were walking back to Seven-up, his uncle spoke to him.

"That was the Briggs boy you was talkin' with, wa'n't it?" he asked. "Cap'n Bailey's grandson?"

"Yes, Uncle John."

"Thought so. Got a new overcoat, ain't he?"

Raymond had not yet reached the age where clothes mattered to him.

"Has he?" he replied, indifferently. "I didn't notice."

"Looked so to me. Find out where his folks bought it, will you? That coat you're wearin' looks sort of shabby."

He bought a duplicate of the Briggs coat within a week,

taking his nephew to Orham for the purpose. Lorenzo ventured to protest.

"That boy didn't need that coat no more'n a cat needs a wash rag," vowed Weeks. "The one he's been wearin' was plenty good enough. If anybody in this house needs a new overcoat it's you, yourself."

"What's the matter with my coat?"

"About everything that could be, I'd say. Look in the lookin'-glass and you'll see."

Heath smiled. "Last time I looked I couldn't see anything," he observed. "That glass needs a wash rag, even if a cat don't."

"Huh! If you think I ain't got nothin' to do around this house but clean lookin'-glasses you've got another guess. . . . Anyhow, if the truth was known, I bet you Raymond is ashamed to be seen with you when you've got that coat of yours on."

Heath had risen and was on the way to the door of his bedroom. He turned.

"Think he is, do you?" he asked, seriously.

"If he ain't I'm ashamed of him."

The next week John Heath made another trip to Orham and bought a new overcoat for himself.

The addition of the new dining-room wing, which came a year later, followed a conversation between Raymond and his uncle. Raymond had been invited to dinner at the Briggs home. Heath asked him why he did not invite young Briggs to dine at the cottage. The boy hesitated.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, doubtfully. "I guess I won't."

"Why?"

"Oh—oh, nothing, Uncle John."

"Must be some reason. Overboard with it."

Little by little Heath's cross-questioning elicited the fact that Raymond was conscious that the village folk—people of

consequence like the Briggses—were inclined to smile when the housekeeping arrangements at Seven-up were mentioned.

"Nobody else I go with eats and cooks and sits and everything all in one room," he blurted, at last. "*I* don't care, though. I like it. Honest, I do, Uncle John."

Within a month the new wing was begun. It cost a good deal of money and the Heath savings account suffered a heavy shrinkage; in fact there was scarcely any of it left. Living in the little house was, during the building, more like camping out than ever, but even Lorenzo had to admit that the addition was an improvement, although he did so reluctantly.

"And what in salvation's mercy that extry bedroom upstairs is for, the land only knows," he added. "Who's ever goin' to use it, I wish you'd tell me?"

John Heath pulled at his mustache.

"Don't know's anybody will—right off," he admitted, rather apologetically. "Only, some of these days, Raymond may be wantin' company to come visit for a spell, and where'd we put 'em if we didn't have that room?"

The Weeks snort of disgust was emphatic. "That's it!" he growled. "Raymond's responsible. I knew it, of course. All that counts in this house nowadays is just Raymond, Raymond, Raymond! You're spilin' that boy, Hi Heath, that's what you're doin'."

He grumbled so much at the extra housework entailed by the addition to the cottage that Heath was forced to raise his wages. This put a muffler on the complaints for a time, but did not prevent his assuming, on occasions, an air of martyrdom which was almost as trying to the patience. More than once his employer was tempted to suggest that he look for another situation, but of course, never yielded to the temptation. Lorenzo had been with him almost since the beginning of his life in Seven-up and, although he was far from being

a perfect cook and housekeeper he was a loyal follower and, in his way, a staunch friend.

Mr. Weeks no longer attended meetings and sociables at the Come-Outer Bethel. There had been discussions among the members of the small congregation, beginning with a sharp difference of opinion concerning the selection of a new minister and culminating in the secession of more than half the worshipers. The faithful who remained tried hard to keep the society alive, but the struggle was too much for them. They gave it up at last. The Bethel stood empty, its windows shuttered and its doors locked.

A portion of the Come-Outers drifted back to the Methodist fold which, in former days, had sheltered them. Others —Mrs. Hulda Bascom among them—attended occasional meetings of a new sect, "The Society of the Pure in Heart," a branch of which had sprung up in the neighboring village of Denboro. Mrs. Bascom had moved to Denboro, to keep house for an aged and invalid relative there. Apparently she had given up the conversion of Mr. Weeks as a bad job; at any rate, the tracts which had disturbed his conscience so greatly ceased to come. Occasionally, however, he received a letter with a Denboro postmark which caused John Heath some speculation. As Lorenzo never divulged the contents of these letters the speculations were vain.

He—Mr. Weeks—was again a Methodist in good standing. Still conscious of his load of sin, he continued to repent and backslide as regularly as ever, but, on the whole, he seemed happier. He no longer invited Raymond to go to evening meeting with him. The boy—at first under protest —attended the Congregational Sunday school. Later, as he came to know the young group there, he protested less. Still later, it was Lorenzo who protested.

"That young one is old enough to go to reg'lar church," he declared. "Long afore I was his age I had to go mornin's and evenin's too."

"Um-hm," said Heath. "So did I."

"You did? Salvation's soul! nobody'd ever guess it. When did you stop?"

"Soon's as they stopped makin' me go."

"Sho! Didn't you ever begin goin' again?"

"Yes."

"And then stopped for good?"

"Good—or bad."

"Well, I snum! You're a heathen, Hi Heath. Don't you believe in anything at all?"

"Sometimes."

"Them times are few and far between, I guess. Do you want Raymond should believe in nothin', too? Want him to be heathen same as you are?"

Heath's answer was crisp and sharp.

"I don't want him to be anything I am," he said, and walked away.

The following Sunday, to Lorenzo's paralyzed amazement, he suggested that his nephew go to church, adding that he would go with him. On their return the cook had much to say.

"Well, how did you stand it?" he demanded, when he and his employer were alone together.

"Fair to middlin'."

"My soul! How'd the congregation stand it? Any of 'em die of shock?"

"Don't know. Some folks look dead when they're asleep."

He did not repeat the experiment often, but he did occasionally. Nauticook talked, of course, but they were talking of John Heath more frequently nowadays.

The change in his method of earning his living came about casually. It was not the result of deliberate consideration on his part. When the new wing was nearly completed he began looking about for furniture. And again, just as he had done when he built the cottage, he bought only old

things. He attended auction sales, not only in his own town, but in Harniss, Orham and Denboro. At one of these sales —it was held in Orham—he met Mrs. Conway Seymour, and she, more than any one else, was responsible for his returning to his old trade of cabinetmaking.

There was an old maple dining set—a table and six chairs—which Mrs. Seymour, an ardent collector and a judge of antiques, coveted and meant to buy. Her summer home was in Denboro and on the way to Orham her automobile met with a slight accident. In consequence, when she arrived at the old house where the sale was going on, the dining-room set had been sold. Making inquiries, she learned that the buyer was a man named Heath, from Nauticook, and that he had bought the table and chairs at what seemed to her a ridiculously low figure.

"Wasn't much bidding, ma'am," the auctioneer told her. "Of course, if it had been in the regular summer season we might have done better. Most of the city people, the good buyers, have gone back."

Mrs. Seymour saw and examined the dining set and coveted it more than ever. John Heath had returned to Nauticook and she visited him there, late next afternoon. He was just back from fishing and had not yet changed his odorous overalls and high rubber boots. Mrs. Seymour, who considered herself a judge of character and something of a diplomat, decided that she would have little difficulty with this simple, uncouth longshoreman. He could not know the value of his purchase and would no doubt be glad to sell the table and chairs to her at a profit.

It did not take her long to find out that she was mistaken.

"No, ma'am," said John Heath.

"Why—I thought I was offering a fair price. It is considerably more than you paid at the auction. Isn't it enough?"

"Enough if I wanted to sell. I don't."

"Not at all? Not at any figure?"

"No, ma'am."

Mrs. Seymour could not believe it.

"Now just think, Mr. Heath," she urged, in her most persuasive manner; "that table and those chairs are in a dreadful condition, really they are. Before I can possibly use them I shall have to spend a great deal of money to have them repaired and scraped and finished. I am willing to do that because I want them for just one place. A new table and chairs you could buy for less than I offer you for these ruins—that is really what they are, you know—and those wouldn't cost you a penny for repairs."

"Neither will these."

"Oh, but they *must*. You couldn't possibly use them as they are. Now could you, Mr. Heath?"

She smiled ingratiatingly. John Heath smiled also.

"No, ma'am," he admitted; "but I needn't spend anything on 'em. I could fix 'em up myself. Fact is, I'm goin' to."

Mrs. Seymour was a trifle disconcerted. Then she shook her head.

"Do you think you could do it well enough?" she asked. "Have you ever done such work before?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Oh, you have! I didn't know you were a cabinetmaker, Mr. Heath."

The slight hint of sarcasm in the speech was not lost upon her hearer, but he did not resent it.

"Most folks don't," he said, simply.

Mrs. Seymour began to feel that she was butting a stone wall. They had been standing by the front door of the cottage. John Heath opened that door.

"Come into the house, Mrs. Seymour, won't you?" he said. "There's one or two things in here I've fixed over."

He led the way into the living room. Mrs. Seymour fol-

lowed him. Her first glance showed her the chest of drawers standing by the opposite wall.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "What a beautiful highboy! Oh!" rapturously. "May I look at it?"

"Sure!"

She hastened over to the highboy.

"It is a perfect beauty!" she cried. "Look at those legs! And the drawer fronts! *Don't* tell me that is a genuine old piece, Mr. Heath! Is it?"

"Um-hm. About a hundred and twenty-five or thirty years old, nigh as I could find out."

"But," incredulously, "it is in such wonderful condition!"

"It is now. It wasn't when I bought it."

"It doesn't seem possible. Whoever did you find to restore it like this? . . . Oh, you *don't* mean to say you did it yourself?"

"Um-hm. That chair behind you was another wreck. I liked the lines of it, though, and it turned out pretty good, after all."

The chair was a particularly fine Windsor of nine spindles and with unusual lathe work in the legs. Mrs. Seymour exclaimed over it, smoothed and patted it, and then declared that she had a dozen Windsor chairs, but not one as good.

"And you say it was in poor condition when you bought it, Mr. Heath?"

"Um-hm. About what you called the maple table—a ruin. So was 'most everything else in here."

"Mr. Heath, where did you learn about antiques?"

John Heath's tone changed, as it always changed at any reference to his past life.

"Picked it up, I guess," he said, shortly. "Anything else around here you'd like to look at? They ain't for sale," with a dry smile, "but I guess likely you understand why by this time."

Mrs. Seymour was beginning to understand. Being a

woman of sense she said no more concerning the dining set. She did, however, inspect the other furniture in the cottage, also the hooked rugs, and was enthusiastic over everything. Her call was prolonged and, at its end, she made the suggestion which led to John Heath's return to his old trade.

"Mr. Heath," she declared, "this home of yours is a little gem and the things in it are wonderful. Of course I am very much disappointed about the maple table and the rest—I love them."

"Sorry, ma'am."

"Are you really sorry? Because if you are I am sure you'll do me a favor. I have a mahogany secretary, a genuine 'kettle bottom,' that needs a great deal of restoring. It is *so* choice that I have been afraid to trust it to the man in Denboro who usually does such things for me. I had intended sending it to Boston, but now I hope I shan't have to. I hope you will do it for me. Will you, Mr. Heath?"

John Heath pulled at his mustache.

"Sorry, Mrs. Seymour," he said, "but I'm afraid I can't. Fishin's my regular job and it takes me out every day."

"But you could do it in the evenings, in your spare time. I'm not in the least bit of hurry, really I'm not. Please say you will do it for me, Mr. Heath. Won't you? You owe me something for taking my table and chairs from me. Don't you think you do?"

Whatever Heath thought, he found it hard to say no to the lady. He permitted himself to be coaxed into promising that, if she would send the secretary over to Seven-up, he would at least look at it. She did send it and he fell in love with its beauty and realized what he could make of it, if he chose. And so, in the evenings, out in the woodshed, he worked on the secretary.

When, at last, it was finished, Mrs. Seymour's enthusiasm was boundless. It was wonderful, she had never seen such work in her life. It was a crime for an artist like him—

"That's what you are, Mr. Heath, a true artist"—to waste his time in fishing. She had a dozen other good pieces he simply must restore for her. And when she told her friends, and she should tell them, they too would be crazy to have him repair and refinish their treasures.

The price she insisted upon paying him opened his eyes to the possibilities of earning a good deal of extra money and, also, he had thoroughly enjoyed this return to the work which, in other days, he had liked better than anything else. So he yielded to the extent of allowing her to send other things from her collection. After these came more—and still more—from her and from her friends and acquaintances.

The work paid; it paid remarkably well. After a time he went fishing but four days a week, giving the rest of the time to his cabinetmaking. At the end of a year he gave up fishing altogether. Needing more room for a workshop, and a better equipment, he hired a vacant building at the rear of Simeon Black's grocery store on Main Street. The work continued to pour in and his reputation as skilled craftsman to spread. Soon he began to buy, restore and sell a few bits of antique furniture on his own account. This too was profitable. And when Simeon Black died, at the end of another two years, John Heath took over what had been the grocery store and opened it as a salesroom, carrying not a large stock, but certainly the finest assortment of old furniture in the county. His restoring and repairing and refinishing kept him busy in the workshop and, in the summer months, he employed a clerk in the store.

Mrs. Seymour remained his best advertiser and agent. She considered him her own discovery and she boasted of that discovery everywhere. She was continually sending him new customers. Nauticook and Denboro and Orham and Harniss were growing as summer resorts and Mrs. Seymour had a wide circle of wealthy acquaintances.

"But, my dear!" she would say. "You can't mean you

don't know John Heath! Nor his work, nor his wonderful antique shop, nor anything? You must—you simply must! He is really the most remarkable person. And a character. He is so original, so quaint, he says the oddest things in the oddest way. I simply love to hear him talk. He doesn't talk to everybody—you mustn't expect that at first—but he talks to me. He was just a common fisherman when I discovered him, and I found him quite by accident. He is a genius. And such taste! And so scrupulously honest! My dear, if you are looking for good things—rare things—for that new room of yours, you—"

And so on. She was a staunch friend, and John Heath, who was slow to accept friendships, finally accepted hers and, not only listened to her advice in business matters, but sometimes asked for it in his personal affairs.

She called at the cottage frequently. She had taken a fancy to Raymond and, as the boy grew older, the fancy became a genuine interest and liking. She invited him to her summer home in Denboro and introduced him to her nephews and nieces, young people from Boston and New York, from whom Raymond learned many things, some good for him to learn and others not so good. Mrs. Seymour talked of him as she did of his uncle.

"He is quite a remarkable boy," she said. "Very good-looking, almost handsome, don't you think? And so well-mannered. Of course he needs polish. Considering the way he lives, in that little house with that ridiculous Weeks person as cook and general housemaid, it is a wonder that he has any at all. But he is full of promise—he really is. What future his uncle may have planned for him I don't know. It is something I mean to speak with him about some day, but I must be careful when I do it. John Heath is a genius—oh yes! And a perfect dear. But he is very odd, and as proud as the King of England. I know, though, that he is prouder

of his nephew than of anything else and I think—I *hope* he will let me say what I have in mind to say."

Raymond was in his senior year in the Orham high school when Mrs. Seymour carried into effect her announced purpose of speaking to John Heath concerning him. They were in the back room, the workshop, of the Main Street building and alone together. Raymond had been in for a moment and had gone again, but his brief call gave her the excuse she needed.

"Mr. Heath," she said, "I want to ask you something. May I?"

"Don't know why not."

"But this isn't my affair at all. It isn't about furniture or antiques or anything like that. It is about Raymond. What is he going to do when he finishes high school? What plans have you made for his future? I'm sure you have made some."

Heath could not imagine what his questioner was driving at.

"Well—why, yes, ma'am, I have," he admitted, after another interval. "Nothin' very definite, though. I've talked a little mite with Seth Crocker, he's president of our bank here in Nauticook, you know. He thinks he can make a place for Raymond in the bank."

"I see. Have you talked to Raymond about it?"

"No, not yet."

"I'm glad of that, because now I can talk with you before anything is settled. Mr. Heath, have you ever considered sending Raymond to college?"

"College! . . . No."

"I think you ought to consider it. Hasn't he mentioned college to you?"

John Heath considered. "Seems to me he's said somethin' once or twice about that young Edwards fellow—your relation, I mean—about his goin' to Harvard or Yale, one of

those places. Um-hm, I remember now that he did. Said it must be great fun, or somethin' like that. I told him 'twas too expensive fun for poor folks."

"Now, Mr. Heath, you shouldn't talk that way. It might mean some sacrifice, but I'm sure you could afford to put Raymond through college. And I'm just as sure that you ought to do it."

She went on to tell him why. Raymond was not an ordinary boy, he was bright and quick and ambitious and, given the opportunity would, she was certain, make his mark in the world. And, in these days, a college education was almost a necessity. And it was not the education alone, it was the friends and associations made in a university which counted more than all the rest. One met and associated with sons of influential people from all over the country. And, in after life, those friendships and influences meant so much. Why, she knew of a dozen cases where college friendships had resulted in wonderful business opportunities.

"There is just one other thing," she said. "My own nephew, Conway Edwards—the one you mentioned just now—is entering one of our leading universities this coming fall. He is simply wild to have Raymond enter with him. He says that a fellow who can play football as Raymond can would be sure to make the varsity eleven in his junior year, or even earlier."

John Heath understood at last, or thought he did. "Don't doubt that means a whole lot to the Edwards boy—yes, and to Raymond," he observed; "but I'm afraid Raymond'll have to earn a livin'; he won't do that playin' football."

"Of course he won't. But—oh, well, you read the papers, Mr. Heath. You must know what tremendous notoriety—fame, it is really—a great college football player is given nowadays. Perhaps you don't know, though, how many influential friends it makes for him, friends among the alumni, men of power and wealth and wide business connections. If

Raymond *should* become famous as an athlete in his college those friends would be sure to help him when he graduates. After that, of course, his rise depends on himself, but the opportunity to start, with such real interest on the part of one's employers—that is the great thing."

There was more than this—much more. Mrs. Seymour was honestly interested in Raymond Condon and her nephew, young Edwards, was even more so. He and Raymond were great pals, and he had primed his aunt with every argument he could devise. John Heath listened patiently and with interest, but at the end he shook his head.

"'Fraid I can't afford it," he said, frankly. "May be all you say—don't doubt it is—but—well, I ain't rich, Mrs. Seymour."

"You don't need to be. It won't cost so very much."

"Um-hm. Well, what'll it cost—about?"

She named a conservative figure. Heath again shook his head. Before he could speak, however, she made the proposal she had had in mind all the time. She made it tactfully and with great care. She was so interested in Raymond and his future—so, *so* interested—that she would be very glad to advance a part of the expenses for his college course. She had the money lying idle, she could spare it as well as not. John Heath could consider it just a loan and pay it whenever convenient. She would be *so* happy if—

But he interrupted. "No, ma'am," he said, decisively. "No, thank you. It's mighty generous of you, but—no. Whatever start the boy gets, he won't get it on money borrowed from his friends. I appreciate the offer and I'm obliged, but—"

"Oh now, Mr. Heath!"

"No, ma'am."

The best promise she could obtain from him was that he would think over the idea of Raymond's entering college.

Her final remark was made as they parted at the door of the shop.

"Do think, Mr. Heath," she begged. "This is what you must consider most of all. Are you willing to let such a boy as Raymond go out into the world with a poorer equipment than the very best that can be given? Why—yes, I remember now—Mr. Crocker, your bank president, is sending his own son to Brown this year. And I am sure you know of other Nauticook boys who are already in college or are going. Isn't Raymond as worth while as they are? You will think it over, won't you?"

John Heath nodded.

"I'll think," he said.

He did, and the idea which had at first seemed so impossible, became less so as he considered it. He had, in these last prosperous years, put aside several thousand dollars. It was for Raymond, really, that he had saved it. His boy—his nephew, as every one else supposed; his son, as he knew him to be—shouldn't he have as good an opportunity as Seth Crocker's boy, or Bailey Briggs' grandson, or any of the rest of them? Even if it took every penny of his savings, perhaps more, what of it? He had built up a good business, prospects for its future were bright. He could economize, he did not want money for himself. He could put aside even a larger proportion of his earnings if it were necessary. A son like his was worth any sacrifice.

He mentioned the subject to Raymond a few days later. Raymond had been hoping that he might. Young Edwards had questioned his aunt and she had told him of her interview with John Heath. Raymond knew that the latter had promised to think it over.

So when Heath asked him: "Boy, did you ever think you'd like to go to college?" he answered without a second's delay.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "You bet I have, Uncle John!"

"Rather do that than go to work in the Nauticook National, had you?"

"I'll say I had!"

"Hmph! Have to work there hard as you ever would in the bank. Understand that?"

"Of course. I'd work."

"You'd have to. Won't be all football and the like of that. Puttin' you through college would cost a lot of money and I'd expect you to have somethin' to show for it when you finished. Could I depend on you—think?"

"Yes, sir."

"Um-hm. Well, I guess likely I could. You've done pretty well so far."

"Am I going, Uncle John?"

"Maybe. . . . I'm thinkin' about it. You've got to finish high school first. Let's see how hard you work there."

Raymond, quite sharp enough to realize how much depended upon it, worked hard. He graduated with the second highest standing in his class. Also, in the spring baseball games he played so well that his name as a stellar performer appeared several times in the *Item*. Lorenzo read the accounts of the games aloud to his employer. Heath, who had read them already, listened gravely.

"Um-hm," was his only comment. "Must have done pretty well, I guess likely."

"Well!" indignantly. "Say, Hi Heath, if you'd seen him hit that home run in the Harniss game, same as I did, you'd have been hoarse as I was when I got home. I hollered till, by salvation, I couldn't speak a word the rest of the day."

"Oh, that was why. I thought your sins might have sprung up and choked you."

Raymond passed his entrance examinations satisfactorily and, in September, entered the university. Heath said good-by to him at the railway station.

"So long, boy," he said, as they shook hands. "Write once in a while, won't you?"

"Sure. I'll write every day or so."

"Um-hm. Don't forget what you're there for. Study hard."

"Of course."

"Yes. And—if you get into any scrapes or—or trouble or anything, why—well, you know I'm here. Just sing out and I'll answer. Understand?"

"Yes, Uncle John."

"Um-hm. . . . Good-by."

The train pulled out and John Heath turned to walk back to Seven-up for dinner. He realized, as he sat down with Lorenzo at the table, that this was the first of many lonely meals. And it was only the beginning of a permanent loneliness. For seven years he had had a real home, something to return to with expectation and interest. Now that was over. Home was once more merely a place to eat and sleep.

Oh well, it was for his boy's sake. Raymond was, as Lorenzo had said, the only thing that counted nowadays.

CHAPTER VIII

AUTUMN in Nauticook is, usually, a beautiful season, a season of clear, crisp blue and white days and cool, starlit nights. The summer people and the cottagers have gone and the permanent residents see more of each other and find time to renew social relations. The cranberry crop is picked and shipped and furnishes a timely topic of conversation. Politics are active. Improvements and additions to shops and homes are discussed. Altogether a pleasant and comfortable time of year, which passes only too quickly.

This particular fall, however, passed slowly for the occupants of Seven-up. The time dragged, with little to break the monotony. John Heath went to his workshop in the morning, came home for dinner at noon, went back again to stay until six o'clock. The antique and secondhand furniture store had few customers, and Heath tended it himself, his clerk having resumed his winter job of oystering. Occasionally he—Heath—drove to Orham or Harniss or Denboro to look at an old table, desk, sofa, or set of chairs, and made purchases which, during the winter, he would repair and scrape and put in condition for exhibition and sale the following spring and summer. Infrequently some one of the townspeople brought in a bureau or a sideboard or bedstead for him to work upon. More frequently Mrs. Seymour, or other members of his city clientele, sent such articles for his attention, for his fame as a cabinetmaker and restorer had spread over a wide territory. He was busy enough and the work was profitable. Also it occupied his mind as well as his hands. The hours in the shop were not quite as long as those spent at the cottage.

The evenings and Sundays, when he was at home alone, or with Lorenzo, seemed interminable. Even Nuisance was no longer on hand to furnish interest. He had lived, for a dog, a long and happy life and now that life was ended. Lorenzo, calling him for breakfast and receiving no answering yelp, searched and found him dead in a chair in the corner. He was mourned, of course, and John Heath, sitting down to write his biweekly letter to Raymond, found it hard to break the news. Raymond had loved that dog.

Raymond's letters, those received from him, came with fair regularity and were the bright spots in the drab sameness, Heath made it a point to call—Lorenzo was no longer entrusted with the responsibilities of mailman—at the post office each noon on his way down to dinner. The first two or three of those letters were rather depressing, there were traces of homesickness here and there. The recovery, however, was rapid. The boy was having a great time at college, he had met a lot of mighty fine fellows already, the university was "some place," and, best of all, he had gone out for freshman football practice and the coaches were beginning to pay a little bit of attention to him—"not much, of course, but a little."

"And say, Uncle John," he wrote, "if any of the fellows down there in Nauticook tell you they have ever played football, you tell them for me that they don't know what they are talking about. Football up here is what one of our crowd called it, 'Organized murder.' It is fun, though, just the same, and the only thing that will make me quit it *is* murder. I mean it. You wait and see."

Heath received another letter that fall—it came late in September—which gave him a peculiar feeling. He and the Reverend Mr. Coxley had kept up a desultory correspondence, although of late the latter's letters had been more infrequent and very short. The old gentleman complained of various ailments, which could not, he was certain, be due

to advancing age. He felt, so he said, as young in spirit as ever. John Heath had last written him in early July, but had received no reply. Now, in September, he wrote again, but this letter was returned unopened, enclosed in another envelope and with a brief note from the Coleville postmaster explaining that Mr. Coxley had died the week before. The postmaster had seen John Heath's name on the envelope of his letter and so was returning it to him. There was no more than this and, to Heath's relief, no mention of Raymond Condon.

So Coxley—the only person who shared the secret of Raymond's parentage—had gone. That secret was safe enough now. Raymond had not forgotten his mother, of course, but, in his conversations with John Heath he seldom mentioned her name, having learned, early in their association, that, for some unknown reason, the latter did not like to have him do so. The life in Coleville and shadowy recollections of the childish years before he and his mother came to that Ohio town, were fading and dimming. His Uncle John was his indulgent guardian, his confidant and his financial backer, and he was as fond of him as he could ever have been of any one. Nauticook was his home and he was fond of it, too.

So John Heath was satisfied. It was what he had hoped and worked for. Sometimes he found himself wondering whether, in some far-off time, when he was a very old man and Raymond was settled in life, married perhaps, and old enough to understand and appreciate, he might tell him the truth. He wondered—but he never made up his mind. To tell a part of the truth would not do, it would have to be the whole in order to explain and satisfy. That meant raking up all the old shame and disgrace. The boy had loved his mother, had always thought of her as everything a good woman should be. It seemed wicked to smirch such a memory. And what would be the use?

Still, it would be a comfort to—say, just before he died—call Raymond "my son" to his face and be called "father" by him. Yes, it would. Oh well—perhaps—some day. But that some day was not yet, and must not be for a long, long time, if ever.

Lorenzo Weeks' berth, as cook and housekeeper, was a very easy one now that he and "Hi" were once more alone. There was much less cooking to be done and less cleaning and sweeping, with no boy, or boys, to rush in with muddy boots after school and set things topsy-turvy. Seven-up should have been a model of neatness and meals should always have been ready on time. Nauticook opinion was that Lorenzo had a "soft snap."

Lorenzo himself, even if he thought so, never admitted it. In fact he complained more than ever and was provokingly slack about his work. He was just coming down with a new attack of piety and sin consciousness and it was an acute seizure. The Come-Outer Bethel, which had stood empty so long, was now open for business under a new name. The Society of the Pure in Heart had formed a branch in Nauticook and, having bought the Bethel at a very low figure, were holding services there on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday evenings. Mrs. Hulda Bascom had returned to the village and she was a regular and devout attendant. According to report the "Pure in Hearters" were even more noisily devout than the Come-Outers used to be.

Mr. Weeks attended one of the early meetings—at Mrs. Bascom's invitation, or so Heath suspected—and, being susceptible to infection of that kind, came home with his system impregnated with germs. They developed rapidly. One of the Pure in Heart maxims was "Be happy. Sing at your daily task." Lorenzo sang at his, sang early and late, and his singing did not awaken happiness in others.

"For heaven sakes, Lo," demanded John Heath, emerging from his room at seven-thirty one morning, "what set you

howlin' for help just now? It was all quiet aboard here and all at once you set up that screech. You ought to be careful when a man's shavin'. Only by luck I didn't cut my head off."

Lorenzo's feelings were hurt.

"I wasn't howlin'; no, nor screechin' neither," he protested. "I was singin', that's all. I'm happy at my task, same as a Christian ought to be."

"Umph! Didn't sound so. Well, where's the task? You know I told you I wanted to get to the shop early this mornin'. Breakfast ready?"

Weeks sighed. "Breakfast is on the stove," he answered. "It'll be ready soon as it's done. You think too much about your vittles. They don't amount to nothin', Hi Heath. What you need, in this vale of tears, is food for the spirit."

"Looks as if it was all I was goin' to get this mornin'. Did you clean up the sittin' room yesterday?"

Lorenzo coughed. "Well—er—why no, I didn't," he admitted.

"Thought it didn't need cleanin', I suppose? Maybe you're right. I can see across it yet—after the dust settles. What were you doin' yesterday afternoon?"

"Well—er—I went out for a little spell."

"Where?"

"Well, I—you see, they was gettin' ready for a special meetin' at the Bethel last night and somebody had to sweep out and set things to rights. She—I mean, some of the folks up there asked me if I wouldn't do it and I said I would. 'Twas my turn anyhow. A fellow can't shirk everything, can he?" with virtuous indignation.

"Maybe not—all in one day. I'm goin' along. Good-by."

"Eh? Hold on, Hi! What about your breakfast?"

"I'll eat it for dinner. It ought to be ready by then."

"Aw, now, say! Don't go off mad. . . . Growlin' about dust! What's dust amount to, after all?"

"To a thick fog—in some places."

"Dust! The idea! We're all dust, far's that goes. 'Dust to dust,' that's what the Book says. You believe that, don't you?"

"Sure! The sittin' room proves it."

There had been times, during the Come-Outer pestilence, when John Heath had seriously considered hiring another housekeeper in Mr. Weeks' place. Lorenzo's slackness had tried his patience then; now with the Pure in Heart epidemic at its height, it was more provoking than ever. In the old days, when he and Lorenzo were alone, Heath had not minded. His years on the fishing schooners had accustomed him to disorder and poor food and such matters troubled him very little. But since Raymond came they troubled him more. The boy, during his grammar school years, frequently brought his young friends to the cottage and, of course, visited them in their own homes. Of late, particularly during the junior and senior terms in high school, he seldom invited the fellows with whom he associated to come into the house, or, if he did, never asked them to stay for dinner or supper. John Heath, though he asked few questions, noticed this and drew his own conclusions.

That there was anything snobbish in the lad's attitude Heath did not consider for a moment. In the case of any one else he might have suspected it, but not in Raymond's. Whatever Raymond did or thought was right.

And in the Christmas holidays Raymond did bring a college friend down with him to stay over the week-end. This friend—his name was Graves—was a big, broad-shouldered chap, with a pleasant face and an infectious laugh, who, so Raymond took pains to tell his uncle, was a corking tackle and dead sure to make the varsity in a couple of years anyhow. The friend, for his part, confidently informed Heath that Raymond had been the best back on the freshman team and would be "All American" before he finished. Heath,

who had but the vaguest idea what "All American" meant, said that was first-rate.

The Christmas dinner was to have been a meal to remember. In a way it was, but not in the way John Heath intended. He selected the turkey himself, ordered all sorts of out of season vegetables and expensive luxuries, and even sent to Boston for a bottle of brandy in order that the pudding sauce might have the traditional flavor. As the morning of Christmas Day was clear and mild, with scarcely a breath of wind and glorious sunshine, the three, Heath and the two young men, went out in the *Sarepta* for a boat ride. It was cold and snappy on the water, but, being well muffled in sweaters and wraps, the three-hour cruise was enjoyable. They returned at one o'clock ready, as Raymond expressed it, to eat a horse and chase the driver.

Unfortunately Mr. Weeks had attended a Christmas Eve meeting of the Pure in Hearters the night before. It was a lively and protracted session and, after it was over he escorted one of the parishioners to her home and remained there, talking, until nearly one in the morning. There had been refreshments, including pounds of rich and indigestible cake and pie and quantities of strong coffee. Lorenzo, who had long ago forgotten the sermon on the sin of gluttony, partook liberally. Consequently it was nearly four before he fell asleep. When the alarm clock raised him at six he was not in a holiday mood.

Later, after his employer and the guests had gone out in the *Sarepta,* and the turkey was in the oven, he sat down by the hot stove to rest, a rest which shortly became a sound slumber. He was still slumbering when John Heath came in and awoke him. By that time the turkey was done, very well done indeed, and the pudding had steamed until it was a slippery, glutinous mass which, when Heath attempted to slice it, fell apart in soggy chunks.

They made the best of it all, of course. The turkey, when

its outside armor was hacked away, was edible within, even if decidedly dry. The vegetables were watery and the rolls burnt. It was the sauce for the pudding which caused the real sensation. Heath tasted it and then looked across the table at the cook.

"What in the devil is in this stuff?" he demanded.

Mr. Weeks, still heavy-eyed and tortured with indigestion —he had scarcely eaten at all since the dinner began—returned the look rebelliously.

"Well," he said, "there wasn't no vanilla in the house, nor no lemon neither. You was bound to buy all the grub yourself, so if you forgot to buy flavorin' 'twa'n't my fault, was it?"

"I got brandy, didn't I? And I told you to make a brandy sauce."

Lorenzo straightened in his chair. The spark of a righteous fire glowed beneath his heavy lids.

"Yes, you did!" he cried, his voice rising until it cracked. "You did, and what you'd have said to me if *I'd* fetched rum into this place, salvation only knows. You know how *I* feel about the stuff. Ain't we told that it biteth like an adder and—suffereth long and is—well, maybe I forget just the words, but you know what I mean, Hi Heath. *I* wouldn't have brought that liquor into this house no more'n I'd have brought the fires of Tophet."

"Be still! What did you put in this sauce?"

"I put— 'Twa'n't my fault if the bottle fell off the shelf and got busted. The hand of Providence shoved it off, if you ask me."

"I didn't ask you. I asked what you put in the sauce."

"And I'm tryin' to tell, if you'll give me a chance. Thinks I, 'Much as I hate and despise alcohol, he's my boss and I ain't responsible. If liquor he orders, liquor I suppose he'll have to have.' There was some of that cider Benije Simpson gave you last month left in the jug and I put that in. 'Twas

the nighest I could get to the whisky or rum or gin you fetched, wasn't it? Seems to me 'twas."

The sauce was bitter and sour and generally uneatable. Young Graves seemed to think the wrecked dinner and Lorenzo's tirade grand jokes and laughed until his eyes were wet. Heath, himself, was amused, but he was angry too; Raymond, however, did not laugh. He flushed and was obviously very much embarrassed and ashamed. That night, when he and his uncle were alone he spoke his mind.

"By George, Uncle John!" he declared, "you ought to fire Lo. He's getting impossible. If he isn't crazy, he's next door to it. He's a mess, that's what he is. Chuck him out, I say."

Heath shook his head. "Don't see how I can do that, exactly, Raymond," he said. "He's been with me a long, long time. It might be hard for him to find another job, you know."

"That's all right, but there's no reason why he should make the rest of us spectacles before a man like Graves. Uncle John, do you realize who Charlie Graves is? He can play football like a streak, everybody likes him, and he's bound to be called to the best clubs in college. His father is president of the Consolidated Steel Company. He's been used to everything all his life, but in spite of that he's just a regular fellow. I warned him before we came that we lived in a sort of funny way."

"Eh? . . . Oh! Warned him, did you?"

"Oh well, I didn't exactly warn him, but I tipped him off that he mustn't expect the kind of thing he'd been accustomed to. He's all right about it; thinks it's all a whale of a joke, but I tell you it's going to make me pretty sick to have him telling the crowd about that pudding sauce and the rest of it. He's the sort of man I'm proud to have as a friend. And now Lo had to go and spoil it all! It's a shame. I don't think you ought to put up with it any longer. He's getting worse and worse. The whole house looks like no-

body's business. . . . Of course," hastily, "I'm not blaming you the least bit, Uncle John. You're away all day and it isn't your fault. But I do think you're too easy with Lo. He's what I called him in the beginning—just plain impossible."

There was a certain tone—certain phrases—in this heated and lengthy declaration of protest which caused John Heath slight uneasiness. However, it was Raymond—his boy—who had spoken and, after all, Raymond was only a boy. And a good boy—and a smart one. The uneasiness lasted but a little while. The realization that there was much truth in what the young man said concerning Lorenzo lasted longer. Something must be done. He could not—at least, he would not—discharge Weeks, but—well, the time had come when he must do something.

After a great deal of thinking, which involved consideration of all sorts of possibilities, he reached the conclusion that the only alternative to the absolute getting rid of Weeks was the employment of some one to help him with the housework, some one who could cook respectably and with some comprehension of neatness and order. This person, he or she—he very much feared it might have to be a "she"—would not replace Lorenzo, the latter could remain at Seven-up for a while at least; but the helper might be engaged to come in by the day and later, if proved capable, might gradually take charge of and superintend the household routine.

How Lorenzo would accept any such idea he did not know. He dropped a hint and, to his surprise, that hint was favorably received. Mr. Weeks had, apparently, been thinking of some such arrangement although he had not expressed his thought in words. "I realize," he said, "that, now we're liable to have city comp'ny every once in a while, there's more work around here than one pair of hands can do. I've got a notion of my own. Don't ask me what 'tis, I ain't ready to tell you yet. When I'm all set I'll let you know."

Heath could not imagine what this "notion" might be, nor did he believe there actually was one. Whatever was done he must do, himself, and it would save a great deal of superfluous talk and argument if it were done first and the announcement made when the matter was irrevocably settled. On the face of it it seemed silly and extravagant, employing two domestics in a house no bigger than the cottage and with, for nearly half the year, but one man to wait upon. He knew that he should not afford it.

Of course he was not saving money now; the rest of his boy's four years at college would exhaust much, if not all, of his reserve fund in the bank. No matter; Raymond should not, if his father could help it, be ashamed of his home nor to have his friends visit him there.

To find in Nauticook the sort of assistant housekeeper he desired looked rather hopeless. Every one in the village knew Lo Weeks and he could think of none who would care to work with him. It was from outside the town limits that the new helper must come, that seemed certain.

He decided to advertise in the *Weekly Item.* It circulated in a dozen communities and practically every Ostable County adult read it. Framing the advertisement was not easy. In order to prevent bothersome questioning, and particularly to keep the secret from Lorenzo, the identity of the advertiser must be concealed.

The ad, when it appeared, read as follows:

WANTED—A competent man or woman to help with cooking and cleaning in a small family. One who could live outside and come in by the day preferred. Fair wages and a pretty easy job. Answer by letter, giving references, age, and all the rest of it. Address "J," care *Weekly Item,* Denboro, Mass.

He arranged with the *Item* people to have the answers forwarded to him, in batches, by mail.

The advertisement appeared on a Tuesday and a few days

thereafter the first batch of replies reached him. That entire batch was unsatisfactory. Many of the applicants had long stories to tell of why, always through no fault of their own, they had "resigned" from their last places, others were altogether too obviously attracted by the prospect of that "easy job"; others still were much too fussy, they had never done this and they could not possibly do that. One young person wrote that she was considered by her acquaintances to be "prepossessing and attractive" and enclosed a photograph which aroused suspicion that the said acquaintances must be blind. Heath deposited this batch of letters, and the photograph, in the stove at his workshop.

In the second batch, which came the following Saturday, there was one reply which was more promising. It was, at least, sensible and to the point.

South Wellmouth, January 18th.

"J."

Care the *Weekly Item.*

DEAR SIR:

I am a widow, forty-one last June. I have kept house ever since I was a girl, for my father then, and, later, for my husband who died in 1899. After that I kept house for my aunt here in South Wellmouth. Now she is dead and, as the house she lived in did not belong to her, I shall have to go somewhere else pretty soon. And of course I must earn my living. I should rather work somewhere where I could room as well as board, but perhaps the coming in by the day could be arranged if I could find a room handy by at a reasonable price. As to references, almost anybody here in South Wellmouth will tell you about my character, if you ask them, and some of them will, I am pretty sure, be glad to tell you that I know how to keep house. Anyhow, if I don't know that I don't know anything. You can write me, or if you had rather, you can come over some day and see and talk with me. Ask for the Maria Cahoon place. It is off the main road, but you can easy find it.

Yours truly,

SUSAN B. HARWELL

John Heath liked that letter when he first read it. When he read it the second time he liked it even better. This Harwell person was a woman—which was against her, of course—but she wrote like a competent woman with plenty of that kind of sense which is, perhaps with unconscious sarcasm, called common. South Wellmouth was twenty miles from Nauticook, but the next day was Sunday and the weather promised to be fair. Why not hire Solon Bearse's Ford car—he had hired it very often for his antique-hunting trips and could run it perfectly well—and go to South Wellmouth and see Mrs. Susan B. Harwell?

He started next day, as soon as dinner was over. Lorenzo, for a wonder, asked few questions as to his errand or his destination. In fact, Heath suspected that, for some undivulged reason, he was glad to be alone that afternoon. The Ford behaved well, the roads, although slippery in places, were easily passable and the twenty-mile drive was rather pleasant than otherwise.

He made inquiries at the Wellmouth Center drug store and learned that the Maria Cahoon place was "off by itself" on a side road down by the shore. He found it without difficulty, a small white house, facing a little front yard with a big spruce tree in it, and a white picket fence surrounding the whole. The house, the fence and the tree, looked as if they had been set up by a child playing with a toy village. All that was needed were a wooden man and woman, standing on round wooden disks in the yard, to complete the resemblance. Behind the house was a clump of low pines and, at the right the ocean roared and tumbled along a sandy beach.

The house itself, when he approached its front door, was in need of paint, he could see that. The brass knocker on the door, however, glistened brightly. There were geraniums blooming in pots behind the curtains in the parlor windows. He lifted the knocker and let it fall.

The woman who opened the door was of medium height,

or a trifle under it. She had a pleasant face, a pair of bright dark eyes, and a brisk, quick manner. Her manner of speaking, too, was brisk, although her voice was not in the least sharp or disagreeable.

"How d'ye do?" she said.

John Heath echoed the "How d'ye do?" "I'm lookin' for Mrs. Susan Harwell," he added. "Live here, does she?"

"I'm Mrs. Harwell."

"Yes'm. My name's Heath. I put an ad in the *Item* last week. About somebody to help with my housekeepin' 'twas."

The woman looked at him. Then she nodded.

"Yes, yes," she said. "I see. You're 'J.'"

"Yes'm. I'm 'J.' Your letter said come to see you, if I felt like it. So I did."

Mrs. Harwell smiled. She pushed back the door.

"Better come a little further, hadn't you?" she suggested. "Come in."

John Heath entered a small hall, from which a very narrow flight of carpeted stairs led almost perpendicularly upward. Mrs. Harwell closed the door behind them and opened another at her left.

"Go right into the front room," she said. "Put your hat and coat on the sofa. Sit down. That's the best chair, if you like a rocker. Pull it up by the stove; you must be cold."

He took the rocker, an old-fashioned black walnut affair with a crocheted "tidy" on the back. The stove was a tall iron "gas burner" with an urn for heating water at the top. It—the stove—glittered with polish. The carpet was a worn and faded ingrain, but it was spotlessly clean; there was no dust visible upon it, nor, so far as Heath could see, upon anything else in the little room. The furniture, such as it was, looked as if it had been scrubbed with soap and water an hour before. There was a walnut-framed mirror upon the rear wall and, unlike that in the spare room at Seven-up, it did not need wiping with a towel.

Mrs. Harwell seated herself in a straight chair by the marble-topped center table. Her visitor looked at her and she at him. She spoke first.

"Well, Mr. J.?" she said.

John Heath pulled at his mustache. "Well, Mrs. Harwell," he replied, "I—er—Hmph!—don't exactly know how to start. This is a kind of new business for me."

"For me, too. I never expected to answer a 'help wanted' advertisement, but I answered yours. You need somebody to help do your housework and cookin'. I need a job. . . . There! that's some kind of a start, isn't it?"

She smiled once more. Heath laughed aloud, something he rarely did.

"So 'tis," he agreed. "Well, you see, ma'am, my name is John Heath and I live in Nauticook."

" 'Way over there? Did you come from Nauticook in that little open car? Gracious! you must be chilled through. Do pull up by that stove. Let me open the damper."

She was rising to do so, but he held up his hand.

"No, no. Sit down," he insisted. "I'm used to winter weather outdoors. Went boat fishin' the year 'round for a long time."

"Did you? My husband was a seafarin' man. He was lost overboard in a gale off Hatteras."

"That so! Wicked place Hatteras is, they tell me. Never been south of New York myself."

They chatted concerning the sea and sea happenings, wrecks and rescues and long voyages, ships that sailed and were never again heard from, and men who had sailed in them. He learned that she was a captain's daughter and had spent her girlhood in a town on Cape Ann. She had known, or known of, several men who were shipmates of his in the Gloucester schooner. Her parents had been dead for many years. She was an only child and, after her marriage, had lived in Newburyport for a time and afterward in Ports-

mouth. When her husband was drowned she had been forced to earn her own living and, for a year or two, was employed in a small hotel at Salisbury, where, as she described it, she did about everything from hiring the help to making peace between the landlord and the boarders. Then her spinster aunt, Miss Maria Cahoon, who was a stepsister of her mother's, living alone there in South Wellmouth, had been taken ill and, needing a companion and housekeeper, had written begging her to come and make her home with her. This she had done and, ever since, had lived in the little white house.

"Aunt Maria died a month ago," she said, in conclusion. "She rented this house and she has some relations in Boston who will come in for the furniture and whatever things of that kind she left. I can't afford to stay here, and I don't want to, anyway. Keepin' house for a few hens and a cat isn't my idea of a satisfyin' life for a healthy woman no older than I am. I was plannin' to go to Boston, myself, and try to find something there, but I saw your advertisement in the *Item,* Mr. Heath, and—well, just for luck, as you might say, I answered it. . . . There! that's all that's worth while tellin' about me; and plenty enough I guess likely you're thinkin' this minute."

John Heath, as it happened, was not thinking anything of the kind. He had listened to the brief biography with interest and, if his attention wandered at all, it was when he considered his own story and how much of it he should tell when his turn came. Not much, of course. Of the period between his leaving Nauticook as a child and coming back to it as a man, nothing at all. One point in Mrs. Harwell's narrative seemed strange to him and he mentioned it.

"Do you mean to say, ma'am," he said, "that this aunt of yours, after you'd kept house and took care of her all that time, never left you a cent when she died? . . . Not that it's any of my business, of course," he added, hurriedly.

Mrs. Harwell nodded. She had a habit of nodding; short,

brisk nods they were, as characteristic as her step and the quick movement of her hands.

"It was me that started tellin' my business first," she said. "And I take it this is liable to be more or less of a business talk between us, anyhow, Mr. Heath. Aunt Maria would have left me everything she owned, furniture and all the rest, if I'd have let her do it. I wouldn't because those Boston relations ought to have somethin', seemed to me, and the things in this house, most of 'em, had come down in the family and ought to stay in it. She had a little money put by, some in the savin's bank, and a life insurance policy for five thousand dollars that she took out a long while ago. It was in one of those—what do they call 'em?—mutual aid societies, or somethin' like that. The Sons and Daughters of the Silver Cross. Maybe you've heard of it."

Heath nodded. His was a somewhat dubious nod. He had heard of the Silver Cross Society. Mrs. Harwell was not the only one of his acquaintances who hoped to collect from it some day. She appeared to understand the nod and to draw her own inferences from it.

"Oh, I know," she said, smiling cheerfully. "You don't think much of that, as a thing to count on. Neither do I. The Silver Crossers are all tangled up with the law now and goodness knows what or when anything'll come of it—if anything ever does. Mr. Barnes, he's our lawyer here in Wellmouth, seems to calculate I may get a part of the five thousand, if I wait long enough. I only mentioned it because I didn't want you to think I was completely poverty struck, Mr. Heath. It wasn't that made me answer your advertisin'. . . . Well, now, maybe *you'd* like to say a word. It's high time I gave you the chance."

He pulled his mustache. She waited a moment and then added: "Perhaps you don't want to. Very likely you feel you've seen and heard more than enough of me already. If

that's so we'll just say good day and there needn't be any hard feelings at all. There surely won't be on my part."

He smiled and shook his head. "Needn't worry about that, ma'am," he replied. "Fact is, I put in that ad in—er—well, desperation, sort of, and now the time's come when I've got to tell why I did it. I guess you'll think it's foolish, my doin' it at all. I live alone most of the time and I've got a—a sort of housekeeper already. It's the 'sort' that bothers me. This is about how 'tis: You see—"

He went on to explain the situation. He spoke of his coming to Nauticook as a boat fisherman, of his building Seven-up, of the length of time Lorenzo Weeks had been with him, of Raymond—"a kind of nephew, he is, Mrs. Harwell; anyhow he calls me uncle"—of the boy's going to college, of Lorenzo's peculiarities and susceptibility to queer forms of so-called piety, of his growing tendency to slackness due, principally, to these fits. He finished with an account of the Christmas dinner.

"Whew!" he said, in conclusion, "that's more talk than I ever thought I had stowed below decks. I don't blow off steam like this as a general rule, Mrs. Harwell, so don't let that worry you. . . . You're laughin' at that puddin' sauce, of course. Yes, well, I presume likely it must look funny from as far off as South Wellmouth. Nigh to, on Christmas noon, with that young college chap aboard, it didn't make me laugh loud enough to disturb the folks up on the main road."

She was still laughing. He grinned ruefully. Then she said, "I guess I can see the fix you're in. You don't hardly like to tell this Mr. What's-his-name—Weeks—to clear out, because he's been with you so long."

"Can't. It seems too darned mean."

"Of course. . . . Well, I must say you've got patience, Mr. Heath. And what you think you need is somebody to help him out."

"Help me out. If the Pure in Heart gang keep on holdin'

meetin's Lo'll *be* out 'most of the time. Don't make any mistake, Mrs. Harwell; whoever comes into Seven-up by the day will have to do most of the work and be responsible for the whole of it."

"Well, that doesn't scare me. Work never did. It's the findin' the place to stay nights that seems the main sticker, so far as I'm concerned. . . . That is, provided we come to any arrangement, or that you decide you want to try me, anyhow."

John Heath had decided that before the end of the first two minutes of their interview. If a woman must become a part of the *ménage* at Seven-up, he could not hope to find one who, judging by appearance and evidence of ability and common sense, suited him better than this one did. He was very, very lucky, it seemed to him. But now, in this neat, trim little parlor, face to face with its neat, trim, capable occupant, the memory of the dirt and dust and higgledy-piggledy condition of the rooms at home arose to trouble him. He voiced a little of his feeling.

" 'Tisn't that," he said, his brows puckering. "I wouldn't be afraid to try you—no, nor how the tryin' would come out neither. It's your end of the deal that bothers me. We're kind of odd folks over to Seven-up—that's what they call my place in Nauticook. They call me 'queer,' behind my back, I know they do. I guess likely they're right, accordin' to their notions of queerness. If I wasn't queer I'd never have hired Lo Weeks to keep house for me in the beginnin', because he's queerer than I am."

"I should judge so, from what you tell me."

"Haven't told you half. He's got a singin' fit now. Like music, do you?"

"I love it."

"Um-hm, I was afraid you might. Then you wouldn't like Lo's singin'. No, Mrs. Harwell, I don't believe you and I had better come to any settled arrangement just yet."

She tried not to appear disappointed, but he could see that she was, nevertheless. He went on, quickly.

"Oh, I don't mean it's all off," he added. "I hope it isn't, anyhow. But now that I've seen you, and seen the way this house looks, I—well, I shan't go any further till you've seen my place and how that looks. And you ought to see Lo. If you're goin' to work along with him you ought to see him —yes, and hear him. I tell you what I wish you'd do, if it ain't too much trouble. I wish you'd let me come for you in the car some day this week and drive you to Nauticook and have you look us over. After you've done that, if you still feel you could face the music—why, then we'll talk about wages, and the rest of it. Could you do that, think?"

She laughed. "Of course I could, if it suits you better. As to facin' the music, though if you mean this Weeks man's singin'—"

"No, no. I don't. I said that wasn't music. . . . Well, when shall I come for you?"

She hesitated. "I haven't told you everything, Mr. Heath," she said, after a moment. "It's a sort of odd thing, your comin' from Nauticook, because only three—no, four days ago, the man that drives the baker cart told me of a Mrs. Bangs over there who was lookin' for a woman to live with her and take care of her and her house. The baker cart man goes to Nauticook on Mondays and Thursdays and he knows this Mrs. Bangs. Probably you know her too. She's an old lady, lives on what they call the South End Road. She isn't very well, so the baker man said."

"Um-hm, I know her. Mrs. Joshua Bangs. She's had a stroke or somethin' like that. She's a real nice woman."

"So I understand. Well, soon's the baker had gone I sat down and wrote to her, same as I answered your ad. I had a letter from her yesterday. She wants me to come over and see her. I thought I'd go pretty soon, maybe Wednes-

day. I could do what you call 'lookin' you over' the same day, couldn't I?"

"Sure! I'll drive over for you first thing Wednesday mornin'."

"No, you've got your business to attend to. I'll go in the mornin' train; I'd planned to anyhow. I ought to see her first, but I won't say yes or no till I've seen you and Mr. Weeks. You've got a telephone in your shop, of course?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll call you up from Mrs. Bangs's, or somewhere, and tell you I'm on my way to your house. You can meet me there if you want to."

So it was settled in that way. She pressed him to stay for a cup of tea, to keep the chill off on the way home, but he declined the invitation. The drive back was uneventful, although rather slow because of the icy roads. He left the Ford at the garage of its owner, and walked down to Seven-up, reaching there about seven in the evening.

The windows of the living room, dining room and kitchen were ablaze with light. Evidently Lorenzo was at home and, for a wonder, on the job. Supper would be ready and Heath was ready for it.

He entered at the side door which opened directly into the dining room. The table was set, set with a clean cloth, a noticeable novelty, for Mr. Weeks was accustomed to change the cloth once a week, on Monday, wash day. This was Sunday, not Monday. Attracted by the unwonted splendor of the white linen, Heath gave the table momentary inspection. Then he noticed something else. Instead of being set for two persons, Lorenzo and himself, it was now laid for three. There was three plates, with their accompaniment of knives and forks. Obviously a guest was expected, but who? He had not invited any one.

The idea flashed to his mind that Raymond might have

come home unexpectedly. He was striding toward the living room door when he heard a familiar voice behind him.

"Hello, Hi! Here you be, eh?" said the voice.

He turned. Lorenzo was standing on the threshold of the kitchen. An immaculate Lorenzo, clad in his Sunday best, clean-shaven, wearing a new and colorful tie, a fuchsia blossom dangling from the buttonhole of his coat lapel. The glory of his outfit was surprising, but the expression upon his face was even more so. He was flushed, his fingers picked at the lower button of his waistcoat, he was smiling, a sheepish, yet in a way, triumphant smile.

"Have a nice ride, did you, Hi?" stammered Mr. Weeks. "I heard you'd gone off somewhere in Bearse's car. Somebody seen you; they said—"

Heath interrupted. "Is Raymond here?" he asked.

"Eh? Raymond? No, course he ain't. What made you think—"

"Who is here?"

Lorenzo raised his hand to pick at the second button. He shifted his brightly polished boots. He had looked sheepish before, now he looked positively silly.

"Now, Hi," he asked, ingratiatingly, "how in the world did you know anybody was here?"

Heath pointed to the extra plate on the table. Lorenzo grinned and shifted.

"Oh yes!" he observed. "You would notice that, wouldn't you? Well, Hi, I've got a surprise for you. You see— Oh, there she is now! Come right in, Huldy."

Heath turned again. Mrs. Hulda Bascom had entered from the living room. She, too, was garbed in splendor. She bulked large in the small room. Her smile was expansive, her tone oozed sweetness.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Heath?" she said. "You didn't expect to see me, did you? Well, you see— Oh, you tell him, dearie."

She was addressing Mr. Weeks. The latter could not have looked more foolish than he did before, but he certainly did not look any the less so.

"Well, I tell you how 'tis, Hi," he blurted. "This—er—lady ain't Mrs. Bascom no more. She's Mrs. Weeks. Her and I got married this afternoon."

Silence followed this disclosure. The happy bridegroom shuffled the shining boots, picked at the waistcoat button, grinned and fidgeted. Hulda Weeks—Mrs. Bascom that was—spoke first.

"Well, Mr. Heath," she inquired, "ain't you goin' to congratulate us? Ain't you goin' to say a single word?"

John Heath said more than a single word, he said three.

"Good Lord above!" he exclaimed, with fervor.

"Yes; it's His work," agreed Mrs. Weeks, devoutly.

"Amen," said her husband.

CHAPTER IX

THERE was a great deal of talk during supper. The newly-wedded pair furnished almost all of it. They were far too excited to eat and they explained and narrated alternately or in chorus. John Heath said little and ate less. He was dimly conscious that the food was better cooked and served than any he had tasted at that table for a long time, but appetite was lacking. A person who has been sandbagged and whose brain is still bemused from shock, is not likely to be greatly interested in food. As for talking—well, there was a sufficiency of that and more would have been superfluous. With Mrs. Weeks speaking shrilly and continuously and Lorenzo—when he felt an interjection necessary—trying to outshout her, even listening with comprehension required more stability of mind than Heath possessed just then.

He gathered that the marriage was a sort of spur-of-the-moment affair. Of course, so Hulda explained, with an elephantine simper, there had been what you might call an understanding between her and Lorenzo for some time. They had realized that they were just suited for each other; both of them all sole alone in the world and both interested in the same things, as you might say. And she had seen from the very first that the poor dear soul—with a beaming smile across the table at her husband—"needed somebody to look after him and keep his feet in the straight and narrow path, so—"

"'Twas her, if you'll believe it, that used to send me them tracts," broke in Lorenzo, with the air of one impart-

ing astonishing information. "What do you think of that, Hi? And you and me couldn't imagine who—"

"Yes," cut in the bride. "I sent them. I hoped they might be helps to you along the way, so to speak. They did help, too, didn't they, dear?"

"I'll say they did. Salvation's mercy! how I did use to read them tracts. They kept acomin' and acomin' and I kept thinkin', 'Now, who in—' I mean, who *do* you cal'late—"

"Yes. Better let me tell it, Lorenzo. We got sort of attracted to each other, Mr. Heath, and, one day, he—er—Oh dear, I'm afraid it sounds kind of silly to tell right out like this—he—er—spoke to me, you know, about—about our bein' suited and hadn't we better—"

"On the way home from meetin' 'twas. Right there along by Judah Ellis's place, Hi. I'd been thinkin' it over for a consider'ble spell, but I don't know's I'd had the spunk to out with it if Huldy hadn't give me the hint. 'Lorenzo,' says she, 'I—'"

"There! There!" rather sharply. "Don't talk foolish, Lorenzo. Me—droppin' hints! The idea! Well, anyhow, Mr. Heath, even after we'd settled it we hadn't no idea of marryin' so soon. 'Twas just to-day, after meetin'—"

And so on. The Society of the Pure in Heart was about to lose its preacher, he had received a louder call from another congregation in New Hampshire, and, as Mrs. Weeks declared with the enthusiastic approval of her husband, he was a perfectly wonderful man and everybody thought *so* much of him. He, it seems, had been let into the secret of the understanding between his two parishioners and had expressed his regret at not being permitted to remain long enough to join them in wedlock. And then one of the pair —Hulda said it was Lorenzo, but Lorenzo looked very much surprised when she said it—had been inspired to suggest that he do it that very day. After all, what was the use of waiting? They were going to be married in a little while, any-

how, etc. Obviously a clear case of "Eventually, why not now?" or many words to that effect. And it would be such a comfort in after years to remember that it was dear Mr. Todd who had tied the knot. So the knot was tied.

"I had to roust out Jim Hawes—town clerk, you know he is, Hi—to get the license," boasted Lorenzo. "I got it, too. He didn't seem to be dead sure whether, bein' as 'twas Sunday, 'twould be lawful, but says I, 'Better the day, better the deed.' He, he! that was a good one, wa'n't it?"

After the ceremony they had dined together at the Wayfarers' Rest and then, after a few hours of preparation on both sides—preparations for something evidently to be disclosed later—Hulda had hastened down to Seven-up to help prepare the supper they were now enjoying.

"Huldy, she done 'bout all the cookin'. Pretty good job, too, I call it; don't you, Hi?"

John Heath asked a question then, one which had been forcing itself upon his attention during the latter part of the touching love story.

"Well? And what's next on the program?" he inquired.

Bride and groom looked at each other. Hulda simpered and Lorenzo looked particularly foolish.

"You tell him, dearie," urged the lady.

"Well—er—well, I tell you, Hi. We hate to leave you all alone, but if you can get along by yourself for a couple of days we was cal'latin' to go up to Brockton on—on what you might call a weddin' trip. We're goin' over to Denboro to-night—Huldy's got relations over there, you know. We'll stay to their house till to-morrow mornin' and then we'll take the early train to Brockton. Be back Wednesday. Think you could spare me that long, Hi? 'Twould be kind of nice if you could."

Heath thought he could and said yes so promptly that Lorenzo seemed rather taken aback.

"I—that is, we realize it'll be kind of hard for you, but

—well, you see how 'tis. Fellow don't get married every day in the week, now does he? We'll wash up dishes and the like of that afore we go. You needn't worry about that part."

So far as the dishwashing was concerned Heath was not in the least worried. He was, however, recovering slightly from the effects of his sandbagging and other matters were beginning to trouble him.

"You'll be back Wednesday," he repeated. "Um-hm. Then what?"

The couple again exchanged looks. Lorenzo spoke hastily. "Oh, we've got that all planned out," he declared. "Somethin' you said to me a spell ago give me the notion. You see—"

"Dearie!"

"Eh? . . . Yes?"

"We agreed we wouldn't talk about that yet. Now you help me clear off; we'll have to start pretty soon."

They started a half hour later. John Heath bade them good-by and, returning to the living room, sank into the rocker with a sigh of relief. He could think now and there was much material for thought.

Just what effect would this crazy marriage have upon future domestic arrangements in the cottage? He had been in high good humor during his drive home from South Wellmouth. He had been greatly impressed with Mrs. Susan Harwell, her sense and evident capabilities. If she did eventually consent to take charge of his housekeeping problems, those problems were settled, he was sure of it. Now, in the face of this new and totally unexpected development, he did not know what to think. Did Lorenzo's taking to himself a wife—or, to be more exact, Hulda Bascom's taking him for a husband—mean that Lorenzo was quitting employment at Seven-up? Of course it must mean just

that. And yet—what had Lorenzo meant by the statement that he and Hulda had it all "planned out?"

And, here was another tangle, if Lorenzo did give up his situation, and he—Heath—were left alone in the cottage, could he ask Mrs. Harwell to come there and live and keep house for him? Nauticook was no different from any other village of its size, but people talked about their neighbors, and were only too ready to say mean things. There had been a time, before Raymond came, when what people said was a matter of absolute indifference to him. It was so no longer. And, besides, Mrs. Harwell had her own reputation to consider. She would not come there, under such circumstances, even if he were willing to have her do so.

He pondered until his brain was tired and reached no conclusion other than the unsatisfactory one that he could do nothing except wait until the honeymooners returned. They would be gone but two days and Mrs. Harwell had promised to see him before she accepted another place.

Work in the shop kept him busy during Monday and Tuesday. He took his meals at the Wayfarers' Rest and spent his evenings at the Sheet Anchor Club. On Wednesday just before noon, the shop telephone rang and he heard Mrs. Harwell's voice over the wire.

She was in Nauticook. She had visited Mrs. Bangs at the latter's home and had had a long talk with the old lady. Mrs. Bangs seemed very nice, she had liked her at first sight, and, so she judged, the liking was returned.

"I can go there to live, if I care to," she said, "but of course you have the first chance, if you still want it. I am telephoning from the grocery store at the corner and, if it suits you, I'll meet you at your house at twelve o'clock. It's only a little ways and I'd enjoy the walk."

So they agreed to meet at Seven-up. Heath was delayed by a caller—Mrs. Jotham Small, it was—and Mrs. Small was "considerin'" having her best spare room bed done over.

The consideration took time and amounted to nothing in the end; she decided to think about it a spell longer. So it was twenty minutes after twelve when John Heath rushed home.

He entered by the door leading to the dining room, ready with apologies for keeping Mrs. Harwell waiting. From the kitchen, however, came a clatter of tongues. He recognized the voices—Hulda's and Lorenzo's—and grunted impatiently. They must have come on the morning train and he had not expected them until late afternoon. Goodness only knew what they might have said to Susan Harwell. Of course they would wonder who she was and why she was there and ask a thousand questions. And he had been particularly anxious that they should know nothing of the advertisement in the *Item*.

The excited chatter in the next room ceased suddenly. He heard Mrs. Harwell's voice. "I think Mr. Heath has come," she said. "I heard the door shut."

Lorenzo was in the dining room a moment later. "Why, yes, here he is!" he shouted, jubilantly. "Well, well, Hi, how be you? Seems's if I hadn't seen you since I don't know when."

His wife was at his heels. Over her shoulder Heath caught a glimpse of the lady from South Wellmouth. She was smiling and there was a twinkle in her eye.

Lorenzo seized his hand and shook it. So did Hulda. Susan Harwell nodded, pleasantly.

"How do you do, Mr. Heath?" she said.

Heath's acknowledgment of the greetings was curt.

"Hello!" she said. Then, addressing Mrs. Weeks, he added, "Pretty prompt, ain't you? Didn't expect you till evenin'."

Lorenzo began a reply, but his wife motioned in his direction and he subsided.

"Now, Mr. Heath!" protested Hulda. "You don't think Lo and me would let you look out for yourself three whole

days runnin'. I should say we wouldn't! The very first thing—six o'clock this mornin' 'twas—I says to Mr. Weeks, 'Dearie,' says I, 'we must hurry up and catch the very first train so's to have Mr. Heath's dinner ready when he comes home this noon.' And 'tis ready, too; been ready since twelve, far's that goes. All you've got to do is set right down. Mrs. Harwell's goin' to take dinner with us. She wouldn't hear of it at first, but we said any friend of yours was a friend of ours and we knew you'd want her to stay."

Mrs. Harwell put in a word.

"I told them I was just a friend of yours from out of town," she said, "and that my call didn't amount to anything. They declared I must stay for dinner, so finally I said I would. I hope I shan't be in the way, Mr. Heath."

"Eh? No, no. Course you won't! Sorry I kept you waitin'."

"I wasn't lonesome. Mr. and Mrs. Weeks have been very entertainin'. They've told me lots of things."

Again John Heath noticed the twinkle. He swore under his breath. What had these two idiots told? And what had she told them? He looked at her and she answered his look with a slight shake of the head. That headshake was a relief; he guessed it to mean that she had told them practically nothing.

They sat down at the table. Once more the cloth was clean and the cooking good. The conversation, most of it, was furnished by the returned honeymooners. They had had a wonderful time in Brockton. Apparently none of the sights of that progressive city had been missed by them. The dessert—Lorenzo had purchased a pie at the baker's on their way from the train—was being served when Hulda offered a suggestion which caused Heath to lay down his fork and stare at her. She had, on her own initiative, taken the chair at the foot of the table opposite him—an ominous

prophecy in itself if he had not already been too perturbed to notice it.

"Lo, dear," she said sweetly, "don't you think this would be a nice time to tell Mr. Heath about the way we've got everything all fixed for him? About—oh, about everything. *You* know."

Lorenzo pulled down his vest. He beamed upon his employer. "She means about our plan, Hi," he explained.

John Heath frowned. "What plan?" he demanded.

"Why, our plan about you and—and the housework and cookin' and the like of that. Don't you recollect I told you we'd got it all planned out for you, Hi?"

Heath remembered only too well. That remark had troubled him ever since.

"I did, anyhow," went on Lorenzo, without waiting for a reply. "I'd have told you what 'twas then, only Huldy seemed to cal'late I'd better not. She thought 'twould be nice to have it for a surprise for you when we got back. Same as dinner bein' all ready and waitin' for you was a surprise. . . . Eh?" triumphantly. "A dinner like this *was* a surprise all right, wasn't it, Hi?"

John Heath again made no answer and again Mr. Weeks did not wait for one. He was under a full head of steam now and nothing could have stopped him.

"My wife—Mrs. Lorenzo G. Weeks—cooked this dinner, Hi Heath!" he crowed. "Yes, sir, she did, and I cal'late you'll agree 'twas a good one! And that's only the beginnin'. She's goin' to cook all our meals from now on. There! What do you think of that?"

Heath did not express his thoughts. He looked first at Lorenzo, then at Mrs. Lorenzo, and then at Susan Harwell. The latter's lips were twitching and the twinkle in her eye was more pronounced than ever. She did not look surprised, although she did look very much amused. Obviously she had already been let into the secret of the great plan.

Hulda bent forward. The table creaked when she leaned against it.

"It's all turned out *so* nice, Mr. Heath," she gushed. "Like the workin's of a higher power, as I don't doubt 'twas. The hand of Providence was in it; I'm sure of that as I be that I set here."

"Amen!" observed Mr. Weeks.

"Yes. . . . Be still, Lorenzo! Anybody'd think you was to Bethel to hear you. There's a time and place for all things. . . . You see, Mr. Heath, I'm all alone in the world—or I was till Lorenzo and me got married. Lorenzo had told me, time and time again, of how much housework there is to do here and how it seemed sometimes as if he couldn't possibly get through it alone. And, only last week 'twas, you mentioned to him that you realized he had more'n he could handle and that you was considerin' hirin' extry help. Well, there! You see? Thinks I, 'Why not?' and Lorenzo, he says, 'Why not?' I just love housework and I'm a good cook, even if sayin' so does sound like tootin' my own horn. We talked it all out. 'Twon't take any extry room—now that we're married, I mean," with a bashful simper, "and, as for the wages—well, I certainly shan't expect more than you'd have had to pay any one else. I'll move right down here; fact is, except for trunks and things, I have moved already. And, between and betwixt the pair of us, this house'll be kept right and you'll be fed right. *Now* you understand what I meant by sayin' 'twas the workin's of Providence, the whole of it."

She paused. Lorenzo once more murmured an "Amen" and this time she did not reprove him. John Heath breathed heavily. He withdrew his gaze from the face of Mrs. Weeks and shifted it to that of Susan Harwell.

"You knew about this?" he asked.

She nodded. "They told me just now, while I was waitin' for you," she said.

When, shortly afterwards, Heath started back to the shop, Mrs. Harwell walked as far as the main road with him. He said very little during the first part of the walk, striding along with his hands in his pockets and, when she spoke to him, answering absently and gruffly. When they reached the corner by the post office he stopped short and, for the first time, looked her in the face.

"Now maybe you'll tell me what to do," he growled. "Devil of a mess this is!"

She laughed. "It's awfully funny," she said.

"Funny! Funny as a case of smallpox! What'll I *do*, I asked you?"

"I don't see that you can do anything, for a while."

His teeth snapped together. "I could chuck 'em both out," he muttered.

"Oh no, you couldn't. What excuse could you give for doin' that? You told Mr. Weeks you were thinkin' of hirin' somebody to help him with the work and now that somebody is provided. And this new wife of his seems to be a real capable cook, that dinner was good enough for anybody."

"Humph! Well, what'll you do?"

"Oh, I shall be all right. Mrs. Bangs seems dreadful anxious that I should come and live with her and I guess likely I'll make a try at it. She's a dear old lady and I'm almost sure we'll get along together. You won't have to worry about me."

He was on the point of speaking, but he did not do so. The realities of the situation were forcing themselves upon him. If he discharged the Weeks couple he must face the alternative of doing his own housework or hiring some one else in their place. To find another and adequate man looked hopeless and as for a woman—well, if he could not ask this woman to come and live with him at the cottage, asking another would be just as impossible.

"Damn!" he growled, savagely, and then begged her pardon for swearing.

She laughed once more. "I know how you feel," she said. "But, truly, I don't see what else you can do for the present. By and by, if things get too bad, perhaps you can get rid of them. And when that time comes, if it does, you can have arranged for some one else. Tellin' a person to make the best of it always sounded like pretty cheap advice to me, but I'm afraid it's all I can offer just now."

She was right and he knew it.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Mighty sorry."

"Why, so am I, in a way. I rather figured on havin' a good time down there at your house. Seemed to me that, judgin' from what you told me Sunday, this Lorenzo of yours must be a joke, and I like jokes. . . . Well, now I guess I'll go and tell Mrs. Bangs I will move into her house as soon as I can get the South Wellmouth place shut up and my things together. That won't take but a few days."

There was a ray of comfort in this.

"See you once in a while, anyhow," he said.

"Why, I hope you will. I shall be awfully interested to hear how you and the Weekses are makin' out. Good-by, Mr. Heath. Yes, and good luck."

So John Heath had a fresh and surprising item of news for his next letter to Raymond. He wrote of the marriage and how Seven-up was now housing a trio instead of a pair. Raymond's answer, when it came, was not enthusiastic regarding the change. He seemed to think that Hulda—his memory of his encounter with her at the Bethel was vivid—was even more ridiculous and impossible than her husband. He was planning to come home for his spring holidays, but he said nothing about bringing a guest with him.

In a way, however, the change was an improvement. Mrs. Weeks could cook and she was scrupulously neat. Meals were ready on time, even ahead of time if it happened to be

"meeting night" at the Bethel, and clean linen and dustless furniture were no longer novelties. And if John Heath had longed for revenge upon Lorenzo for springing the great plan upon him unannounced, he could have satisfied this longing by watching the manner in which the lady "bossed" her husband.

Lorenzo continued, as he always had done, to mention his soul, but that soul was no longer his own—Mrs. Weeks saw to that. She invariably addressed him as "dearie" or "lovey" or in similar terms of affection, but she bossed him within an inch of his life. When she called from the kitchen, "Dearie, you come here, I want you," dearie came. Or, if he did not, she came after him. Lorenzo's idea that his housekeeping duties would be lighter with her to assist him was erroneous. He worked harder than Heath had ever known him to work and he was not permitted the solace of tobacco because Hulda was "down" on smoking. She threw his beloved pipe out of the window and, when, later on, he ventured to sneak out and retrieve it, she put it in the stove.

"No husband of mine," she declared, with emphasis, "shall smell heathen, same as that tract talked about. I sent that tract trusting that 'twas seed thrown on good ground. I *hope* you ain't forgot it already."

Lorenzo's self-control slipped momentarily. "Forgot it!" he muttered. "I wisht to mercy I could forget it!"

"*What!* Well, if that don't beat all! My own husband talkin' that way. The man that used to stand up in meetin' and tell how he was a brand snatched from the burnin'! Well, I do declare!"

"Aw now, Huldy! You don't understand. Seems as if I just *had* to smoke."

"Most burnin' brands do, I presume likely. I guess you haven't been snatched very far. You finish wipin' them dishes quick's ever you can, or we'll be late to Bethel."

"Aw, Huldy! I thought we wa'n't goin' to meetin' to-ight."

"We wa'n't, but we are now. When a person is sick they o to the doctor and I don't know of anybody whose spirit eeds doctorin' more'n yours does, Lorenzo Weeks."

In the living room a short time later Lorenzo expressed is feelings to his employer. John Heath was stretched com-ortably in the armchair, puffing luxuriously at his own avorite brier. Weeks regarded him with envy.

"You're a lucky man, did you know it," he grumbled, tug-ing his best tie into position beneath his celluloid collar. When you're tired you can sprawl around and rest—yes, nd smoke, too, much as you darn please."

Heath looked up from his library book.

"Got a cigar in my pocket, Lo," he observed. "You're elcome to it, if you want it."

"Aw, shut up! You know I can't smoke, she won't let ne. I'm plumb wore out, been haulin' ashes and scrubbin' oors and trottin' from loft to cellar till my feet's trod ut flat as a couple of plaice-fish. And now I've got to rog it way up to Bethel and keep awake while they heave ny sins at my head."

Heath grinned. "All nothin', married man," he said.

"Yeah, so I've heard you say no less'n a million times. By salvation," desperately, "I'm beginnin' to believe you may e right, at that. . . . Eh?" lowering his voice. "Was I ollerin', Hi? Don't cal'late Huldy heard me, do you? Soul's mercy, I hope she never!"

Mrs. Harwell, so Heath heard at the Sheet Anchor Club, ad moved over from South Wellmouth and was now keep-ng house and acting as companion for Mrs. Bangs. One oon, a few days after this information reached him, he met er at the post office. She, of course, was eager to know ow matters were progressing at Seven-up under the new

administration. He told her, dropping a hint concerning Lorenzo's subjugation. She smiled.

"I ain't surprised," was her comment. "If ever anybody looked to me like a born whip-snapper 'twas that Hulda Weeks. She'll make that poor little fat man toe the scratch or I miss my guess. Well, it'll do him good, probably. And I'm glad that you don't have to live in a dust heap any longer. She doesn't boss you, does she?"

"Not yet."

"Look out you don't get to be just a boarder in your own house."

"I'm lookin'," grimly.

"That sounds as if you was. I don't believe you're very easy to boss, Mr. Heath."

"Depends on who does it."

"I see. . . . How is your nephew gettin' along up at college?"

They talked of Raymond for a few minutes and then, as she had to hurry home and prepare Mrs. Bangs' dinner, they parted. She repeated her invitation to call.

"I'd like for you to see what a nice place I've got," she said. "And," with another of her quick smiles, "I want to hear more about those ridiculous Weeks folks. They're awfully funny."

"Um-hm. Well, if Lo laughs himself to death I'll let you know."

One evening of the week following this chance meeting he did call at the little Bangs house. It was a homelike place and, under Susan Harwell's hand, it was as immaculate and trim as the South Wellmouth parlor had been. He met Mrs. Bangs—they had met before, but only casually—and found her a pleasant, cheerful little old lady who sat in a wheeled chair and desired to be told every single bit of news in Nauticook.

"That's the only mite of fault I've got to find with Susan here," she declared. "She isn't a Nauticook woman and so she can't tell me whose child has got the measles and what's bein' whispered around about the minister and his wife. Do come real often, Mr. Heath. You know all the town talk, of course, and—well, I've got such a mean, gossipy disposition."

She was wheeled to her room at nine o'clock by Mrs. Harwell who after preparing her mistress for bed and seeing her safely tucked in, returned to the parlor and the caller. She and John Heath chatted for another hour. When they parted at the door he had promised to come again.

"Do, any time," she said. "Company cheers Mrs. Bangs up so. She does love to talk."

The call was repeated a week or so later and frequently thereafter. John Heath was rather lonely at Seven-up, with Raymond gone and Lorenzo and his wife occupied with their own affairs and those of the Pure in Hearters. His estimate of Susan Harwell's good humor and common sense was confirmed on closer acquaintance. She forced him to revise his estimate of the female sex. You could talk with her as comfortably as you could with a man and her opinions were more worth while than those of most men he knew in Nauticook. The calls were a pleasant break in his dull routine.

Raymond came home, as he had promised in his letter, for a few days during the spring vacation. He had broadened and lengthened a little and was more self-reliant and sure of himself. He was having a swell time at the university. He was in with a grand crowd, some of the best of the whole bunch. He was a second string shortstop on the baseball team and was going to work like blazes to make a showing at football in the fall. Had his uncle seen what that fellow said in the *Herald* about his chances? He had the clipping in his pocket. Oh yes, and Charlie Graves had asked him

to spend a month of his summer vacation on his father's ranch in Montana.

"Hunting and fishing and riding—oh, it's a corking place, Uncle John. I'd have a great time out there. Of course I'd hate to leave you for so long, but—well, what do you think? Charlie's people want me to come and they'll pay all expenses. They've got barrels of money. Charlie's sister is a peach of a girl; you ought to see her, Uncle John."

It was his first intimation—to John Heath, that is—that he was in the least interested in girls. Heath realized that this sort of interest was inevitable—it was bound to be—but it came as a slight shock nevertheless. It opened, in Heath's mind, all sorts of possibilities which he did not like to consider. With it, too, came a strengthening of the uneasy reflection that the young man was associating with a set entirely out of his—Heath's—financial class. Mrs. Seymour had evidently considered this a most desirable thing; they were the "influential friends" concerning whom she had had so much to say.

She ought to know, she might be right, but—John Heath made up his mind that, provided the Graves invitation was accepted, those people with barrels of money should not pay Raymond's bills. He would do that himself, even if it took more dollars than he ought to spare. He was spending too much already, but business was pretty good, and—

At any rate, he must not stand in the boy's way.

Raymond, when he came, seemed fairly well satisfied with the new housekeeping arrangements. Hulda Weeks, in his opinion, was even more of a freak than her husband, but she was a swell cook and she kept things clean.

"She and Lo are what the summer people call 'characters,' I guess," he observed. "They are always talking about our 'characters' down here, you know. I guess it's all right. Charlie Graves will get a good laugh out of this Hulda woman the next time I bring him down. His sister asked

me about our 'characters'; he had told her about Lo, of course. She said she was dying to see this house, it must be unique. I said maybe it was, but it was all right, just the same. She's a peach of a girl, Uncle John."

CHAPTER X

RAYMOND did go out to the Graves ranch in Montana and had a wonderful time there. The remainder of the vacation he spent at Seven-up and John Heath saw him almost always at breakfast, less frequently at dinner and very, very seldom at supper or in the evening. The summer colony and the guests at the Inn welcomed the young man to their select circle and he was invited to dinners, clam bakes, beach picnics and the hundred and one social activities which kept them busy up to and including the week following Labor Day.

Mrs. Seymour and young Conway Edwards had taken him under their wing and he was popular, at first partially because of their patronage, but afterwards because of his own good looks, pleasing manner and personal charm. The fellows liked him and the girls sought his society. His fervent admiration of Charlie Graves' sister was but a fleeting fancy; her place in his "peach" orchard was soon taken by a damsel from St. Louis, and she, in time, was succeeded by one from New York. Heath, at first a trifle apprehensive, decided there was no cause for worry. All this was just a part of the boy's growing up. True, it was not in the least like his own growing up, but then, Raymond was not like him in a great many ways. A cause for thankfulness, that was.

College opened in September and Raymond went back a week earlier than the actual opening in order to be on hand for football practice. His letters—they came not oftener than once a week now and sometimes not as often—were filled with nothing but football. He had a "smashing good chance" to get his varsity letter even in this, his sophomore

year. He was playing, for a little while anyhow, in almost every game. He enclosed more newspaper clippings which John Heath read with little understanding but with great pride. After the final big game—in which Raymond, substituted in the last half, covered himself with glory—Heath saw the lad's photograph in the *Herald,* with a half column of eulogy and prophecies of coming greatness below it. If there was truth in what Mrs. Conway Seymour had said concerning the effect of football fame upon its recipient's future, Raymond's future was bright indeed.

The hints, in subsequent letters, about "on probation" and having to study like a "greasy grind" to make up, did not cause any deep uneasiness. Heath did not know precisely what probation meant and he had not the least idea what a greasy grind might be, but if Raymond was studying hard that was fine—no more than he expected, but fine nevertheless.

It was gratifying also to have the crowd at the Sheet Anchor Club mention the boy and praise him. They, too, read the papers and they had all seen the photograph. Lorenzo carried the clipping about with him in his vest pocket and exhibited it on the least provocation.

"I told you!" crowed Lorenzo. "Recollect what I said when he knocked that homer in the Harniss game? 'Keep your eye on that young feller,' that's what I said. Knew what I was talkin' about, I guess likely, didn't I? I 'most generally do, far's that goes."

Mrs. Harwell saw the photograph and read the eulogies and she congratulated Heath. Her interest in his idol was particularly gratifying. They talked about him a great deal, for Heath's calls at the Bangs house were regular twice a week happenings now. Once in a great while, usually when he was away, working at the shop, she dropped in at Seven-up to see, so she said, if the Pure in Heart housekeeping was still pure. "I feel sort of responsible, I don't know why,"

she confessed. So far as neatness was concerned she had little fault to find. The new broom was sweeping clean. The owner of the cottage was well fed and his house well cared for. Occasionally, of course, he had to put his foot down and assert his independence. If John Heath was still captain of his own ship, Hulda was an aspiring first mate, and would have assumed command if he had permitted her to do so.

She came home from meeting late one evening, with her husband in tow, to find her employer lounging in the chair by the center table, his head bent over a library book, a pipe in the corner of his mouth and the room blue with tobacco smoke. She glared about her, coughed loudly, and then, stalking to the window, threw up the sash with a vindictive slam. John Heath looked up from his reading. The icy draft from without rattled the pages of the book in his hand. He rose, put the book face down upon the table, and, walking over, closed the window. Then he returned to his chair.

Mrs. Weeks' red face glowed like a July sun. Her big hands in their cotton gloves opened and closed.

"Well!" she exclaimed. For one word it expressed a great deal. John Heath regarded her calmly.

"Hello, Hulda," he observed. "When did you blow in?"

"I *came* in this minute; I didn't blow."

"You would have if you'd been nigh that window."

"John Heath, I must say—I never in my born days! How can you sit there and breathe such—such filth I vow I can't see! I'd be ashamed to ask a—a *hog* to stay in this room five minutes."

"Um-hm," gravely. "So would I—but maybe I'm fussy about my company. If you and Lo are expectin' visitors don't mind me."

"Oh! . . . Lorenzo Weeks, why do you stand there, sayin' nothin' and doin' less? Can't you see I'm chokin' to death?"

Lorenzo, staggered by this unexpected appeal, stepped forward and then stepped back again. He opened his mouth but nothing of much importance came from it.

"Why—why, Huldy!" he faltered. "Now, dearie, I—I—"

Heath came to his rescue. His tone was still suavely quiet.

"Just a minute, Lo," he said. "How's the weather out doors?"

"Huh? Weather? It's freezin' cold and blowin' like Jehu besides."

"Plenty of fresh air out there, ain't there?"

"I'd say there was!"

"Um-hm. Don't belong to anybody in particular, either, does it?"

"Belong to anybody?"

"Yes. Because, you see, this is my house and what's in it belongs to me. If I like my air thick that's my business. Outside, though—well, that's different. You and Hulda can go out there and breathe any time. Yes," significantly, "and stay just as long as you want to."

He picked up his book from the table and resumed his reading. Mrs. Weeks glared for another brief interval, her lips pinched tightly together. Then, seizing her husband by the arm and dragging him with her, she marched to the door of their bedroom, pushed him into that room, and slammed the door behind them. From within sounded a buzz of voices, the feminine predominating, which lasted for a long time. John Heath filled and relighted his pipe, turned the page and read serenely on.

Little domestic scenes of this nature were repeated at intervals. On the whole, however, life at Seven-up—for its owner, that is—was comfortable enough. Lonely, but then loneliness was to be expected. Some day, perhaps, when Raymond was through college and if—Heath had not

given up the idea altogether—he should enter the employ of the Nauticook National Bank, there would be a change for the better. Meanwhile what was must be endured. He was grateful to the fates for bringing Susan Harwell to the town. She was the one person with whom he could discuss Raymond and his plans for Raymond, and his own interests and ideas.

So another year crawled by, and yet another. Raymond was a senior now, secretary of his class, captain of the varsity eleven, no longer a boy but a man. He considered himself very much a man and did not hesitate to offer advice to other and far older men when he came home for the short sections of vacations which his various invitations and social engagements permitted him to spare for Nauticook. Newspaper clippings were no longer novelties. John Heath secretly, and Lorenzo openly, possessed large collections of these clippings. "Ray" Condon's prowess on the football field was exploited on the sport pages of great newspapers all over the country, sharing space with the war news from Europe. There were all sorts of photographs, showing him punting, catching passes, running down the field with the ball, standing with the coaches watching practice, sitting on the bench doing nothing in particular. The "All America" prophecy had already been fulfilled; he was picked by a large majority of sport writers for "All American" right half after the big game in his junior year. His election as captain was a foregone conclusion long before it took place. He was an athletic hero of nation-wide celebrity and Mrs. Conway Seymour's "I told you so's" were, among her friends, so frequent as to be almost nuisances.

And, in spite of all this, John Heath had never seen the hero play, had never in his life seen a game of football between two university teams. Raymond had begged him to do so many times, but he had always found one excuse or another for remaining at home. As a matter of fact, the real

reason was a peculiar one, a vague but quite actual feeling of uneasiness. All this newspaper glory and spread-eagleism over the playing of what was, after all, only a game, seemed strange to his practical mind. And, although the pride was there, beneath it was a doubt which troubled him. The young fellow could play football but, as he had said to Mrs. Seymour three years before, you couldn't make a living playing football—at least, if you could it was not the sort of living he wished his Raymond to make. And, too, it seemed to him, the universal praise and continual posing in the spotlight were having an effect which he did not quite like.

Mrs. Harwell expressed these feelings when, after he had shown her a full-page interview with Raymond in the *Globe*, she said:

"John, you don't think all this is—well, bad for him, do you?"

"Bad? What do you mean?"

"I guess you know what I mean. He isn't very old and all this hurrahin' and pattin' him on the head would, seems to me, be liable to swell 'most anybody's head—old or young. I never thought it was good for a person to think he or she was too good."

He stirred uneasily. "Raymond's all right," he declared, with defiant emphasis. "I haven't seen any signs of his gettin' too stuck on himself."

"That isn't exactly what I meant. What I had in mind was that his bein' called such a wonder now, while he is in college, might make it harder for him by and by, when he gets out in the world and has to find his own place and make his own way. There won't be any football then. He'll be just like any other young fellow startin' to work. It will all be so different that—well, I'm afraid it will be pretty hard for him at first."

"Do him good," doggedly. "Oh, he'll come along all

right! And all this stuff in the papers will help him. I told you what Mrs. Seymour said about that."

He had told her, of course, but now he told it again. It seemed to Susan Harwell that he was arguing quite as much to stifle his own doubts as to convince her.

"When he gets down here in the Nauticook National," he said, in conclusion, "he'll settle down and be just one of the folks; his feet'll be on the ground, I guess likely. Only," with a contented nod, "it'll be a darned sight better ground than most of the feet 'round here had to shove against when they started."

She smiled.

"Better than your own had; eh, John?"

"Huh! That wouldn't be sayin' much."

"I wonder if he appreciates what you are doin' for him."

"Haven't done much of any account."

"Why!" indignantly. "Don't be silly! You couldn't do more if he was your own son. There ain't many uncles like you, at least I never heard of any. And you ain't even his real uncle, or so you told me once—just a second cousin or somethin' like that. You must have thought a lot of his mother. 'Twas her that was your relation, wasn't it?"

He rose and glanced at his watch. "Time I was under way," he said. "Well, so long, Susan. See you again pretty soon."

Mrs. Harwell, next morning when she took Mrs. Bangs' breakfast to her room, sat down on the edge of the bed and asked a question.

"Did you ever know Mrs. Condon—Raymond Condon's mother?" she asked.

The old lady shook her head. "Never heard of her till the boy came here to live. Some kind of cousin of John Heath's, wasn't she? No, she never was in Nauticook. Nobody around here knew her. Why?"

"Nothin'. I was just kind of curious, that's all."

The final game of the football season for the eleven captained by Raymond Condon was to be played on the third Saturday in November. It was the great game—*the* game, those which came before counted for nothing in comparison. Two great universities, rivals on the gridiron since the beginning of American football, were to fight it out once more and this time neither side was credited with the possibility of a walk-over. It would be a grand old scrap and the "breaks" would decide it, so wrote the sport page specialists.

Quoting Lee Oates, specialist of specialists: "If one team has Art Cummings, the other meets it with Ray Condon. Can Cummings' passing affect Condon's dodging and broken-field running? We don't know—nobody knows; but sixty thousand people will be on hand to watch the answer. As for tickets—well, our telephone is out of order."

John Heath had two of these precious tickets. Raymond had sent them to him, with a letter begging him to come up to the game.

"It is my last football day," he wrote, "and your last chance to see my team play. It ought to be a darned good game and I'd like to have you see it. It will mean taking only one day from your antiques. Come on now, be a good sport and say you'll be on hand to root for us."

So Heath had written that, for this once at any rate, he would be a good sport. He invited Seth Crocker, the bank president, to go with him and the invitation was gratefully accepted. But on Friday Crocker phoned to say that he would not be able to go, after all; a matter of business connected with the bank made it necessary for him to remain in Nauticook. Getting rid of the extra ticket would have been easy enough, at least a dozen men in the village would jump at the chance to see that game, but Heath did not offer it to any one of these. He had invited Crocker because, by and by, if his plan worked out as he hoped, Raymond would be in the bank's employ and here was an opportunity

for the boy to "show off" a bit before his future chief, a sort of exhibition which could not do any harm, certainly.

The extra ticket was still in his pocket when he went home to supper. At the table Lorenzo, who had talked about little else but the game for a fortnight—when his wife permitted him to talk, that is—began again.

"Well, by to-morrow night," he observed, "we'll know how she's come out, won't we; how bad Raymond's crowd beats 'em, I mean. Chris Snow up to the depot, he'll get the news over the telegraph, and he's promised to let 'em know at the post office. I'll be all of a titter till I get that score."

His wife, majestic behind the teapot, sat back in her chair. Her double chin became more emphatically double.

"I guess you've forgot there's a Bethel service to-morrow evenin'," she said, with chilling severity. "You have a habit of forgettin' such things lately. 'Twa'n't so when we was first married; you didn't forget then."

Lorenzo's hand, holding a section of saleratus biscuit, sank despairingly toward his plate.

"Aw, Huldy," he pleaded, "won't you let me sneak out of that meetin' time enough to make the post office afore it shuts up? They won't notice. Seem's if I couldn't sleep till I heard that score."

"Sneak out! Well! I must say it don't make me very proud to hear the man I'm married to call himself a 'sneak.' No indeed you shan't sneak out! When the service is over we'll *walk* out together. Now we won't talk any more about *that*."

John Heath spoke. He had been listening to this bit of marital dialogue with an amused smile. Now, however, something—perhaps the tone of crushing certainty with which Mrs. Weeks delivered this final decree—caused him to cease smiling.

"Lo," he said, "you'd like to go to that game to-morrow, wouldn't you?"

"Eh? Like—! Aw, what's the use of askin' fool questions, Hi?"

"Ain't askin'," quietly. "I'm tellin' you that you're goin'."

The saleratus biscuit fell to the table. Mr. Weeks actually turned pale. His wife, however, did not. She reddened, glared, and sputtered.

"Goin'!" she cried, shrilly. "Why—what sort of craziness are you talkin', John Heath? Goin'? Who says he's goin'—anywhere?"

"I do. I want him for company. I'll pay his bills, of course. He's goin' on the mornin' train with me. We'll be back time for supper Sunday night, Hulda. You can get along till then, I shouldn't wonder."

The storm broke and raged for several minutes. Hulda, after she was convinced that the amazing statement was made in earnest, vowed that she would not hear of such a thing. She could not get along alone—or, if she could, she did not propose to. And she also did not propose to allow her husband to miss his church and neglect his duties as a professing Christian to associate with a squalling, screeching gang of drunken Bedlamites such as she understood always went to them football games. Other folks might go, if they wanted to, she had nothing to say about their goin's on—although she could tell enough that was said, of one or two of 'em anyway, if she'd a mind—but when it came to her own husband—

Heath broke in just here. "Lay to a minute, Hulda," he ordered. "Lo's wages'll go on just the same to-morrow and Sunday as any other days."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Somethin'! They'll keep goin' on long as he does what I want him to. When he don't they stop. I want him to go with me to-morrow, you understand. Have breakfast ready by six; we can't miss that train. . . . Good night. I'm goin' up street now."

Breakfast was ready at six. And Lorenzo garbed in his Sunday best, was ready also, although he was far too excited to eat. His wife was, contrary to custom, silent during the meal. Her face was crimson, her hand shook, and she served the coffee as if she wished it were prussic acid, but she made no more protests. Heath's reference to a possible cessation of wage payments had had its effect. Hulda Weeks knew an easy berth when she occupied it and berths as easy as hers and her husband's at Seven-up could not be found in a week or a month. She was simmering inwardly, but she was too prudent to boil over.

Not until after the train pulled out of the Nauticook station did Lorenzo really begin to believe in his good luck. Then he leaned back in the car seat with a long, luxurious sigh.

"Soul's mercy to me!" he exclaimed, fervently. "I be goin', after all! There'll be Tophet awaitin' for me when I get back again, but that's 'most two days off and I shan't worry. No siree, I shan't! It may be sinful, same as she says, but I shan't worry about that neither."

"Right you are! All nothin', Lo. Forget it."

"You bet! I'm goin' to have a good time. Let 'er go!"

The big city station was crowded when they stepped from the train. People, young and old, pushed by them, laughing, excited, decked with the colors of Raymond's university or those of its rival. Men and boys selling miniature footballs, badges, flags and feathers pressed their wares upon them. Lorenzo was indignant.

"What in the nation do you cal'late I want of that thing?" he retorted, shoving one of those merchants out of his way. "I wouldn't be found dead with that color rag pinned onto me. Say, Hi, I guess them fellows don't realize we're relation to the cap'n of a *reg'lar* team."

They lunched in a sandwich shop on the corner and then boarded a crowded street car bearing the sign "To the

Stadium." Raymond had written his uncle that it would be impossible to see him before the game, but that, when it was over, Heath and Mr. Crocker—who he supposed was the holder of the ticket—must go directly to his room in the college yard and wait there. He would join them as soon as he could get away.

The car was packed, seats, aisle and platform. It was one of a long row which, as Lorenzo said, crawled about as fast as a string of lame turtles, and took a full hour to reach its destination. Pushed out at last into a mob all moving in one direction, the pair moved with it, were jammed through a narrow entrance, walked in muddy trails below towering, ivy-grown walls, climbed wooden stairways and, finally, emerged upon the sloping side of a huge amphitheater, to become insignificant units in a mass of elated, colorful humanity.

The seats were choice ones, of course, in the center of the field, directly above the benches to be occupied by the players, substitutes and coaches, and high enough to afford a perfect view of the entire gridiron. Mr. Weeks squeezed his plump figure down upon the narrow section of cement bearing the number on his ticket stub and gazed above, about, before and below him.

"Salvation's mercy!" he gasped. "Are all them—them dot things over yonder real folks same as us? My soul, look at 'em! Why, there's more folks here than there is in Nauticook and Orham and Harniss and Wopatomac and—and Bayport, don't know's there ain't."

"Call it consider'ble more than there is in all Ostable County and you wouldn't be far off. It's a city, that's what it is."

"By time, you're right! And look at the clothes on 'em! Look at the fur coats and things. Say, Hi, how'd you'd like to be selectman in a place like this? Some fun collectin' taxes, eh?"

Heath nudged him to silence. Their neighbors on the cement benches were turning to look.

The acrobatics of the cheer leaders on both sides occupied their attention, and the music of the rival bands was inspiring. Then, from the far corner of their side of the field came a shout, which grew and mounted to a thunderous roar. One half of the great assemblage sprang to its feet, waved its arms and became delirious. A little group of men wearing sweaters and moleskins was running out on the field. At their head, a football under his arm, was a familiar figure. John Heath recognized it and his pulse jumped a beat. Lorenzo recognized it and went crazy.

"It's Raymond!" he screeched, hopping up and down. "It's Raymond, Hi! See him! See him! . . . Oh, you Raymond! Whe-e! Whoo! Wow!"

Players and substitutes reached the benches on the edge of the field just below them and stopped there. Raymond looked up, scanned the rows of faces peering down at him—then smiled and waved a hand. John Heath's pulse jumped another beat. That was his boy the multitude was acclaiming—his son. Of course it was only football, just a game, but—He waved his hand in acknowledgment; then he turned to push the frantic Lorenzo down again upon the seat. It took all his strength to do it.

"But it's Raymond, Hi! It's Raymond! Don't you see 'tis?"

"Sure I see. Sit down and shut up!"

The varsity eleven ran out for a minute of final practice. The rival team came on the field and the hurricane of applause which greeted it aroused Lorenzo to furious resentment.

"That's it—holler, you pesky fools!" he muttered, Heath's hand on his arm restraining his desire to express his feelings more loudly. "Holler now—you won't do much hollerin' pretty soon. Listen to 'em, Hi! You'd think they cal'lated

they was goin' to beat, wouldn't you? Ain't they got *no* sense?"

The officials, in what Weeks, shivering sympathetically, called "middle of summer duds," appeared. Raymond and the captain of the opposing team met in the center of the gridiron, the coin was tossed, the players lined up, the whistle blew, the ball was kicked.

The great game was on!

And it was a great game. The enthusiastic sport writers, the specialists, the ex-stars employed by the papers to describe its features, filled pages next day with their encomiums. The almost perfect football game, some of them termed it. A struggle between two plucky, beautifully coached teams, each determined to gain every possible inch and yield none. Back and forth the ball moved, threatening first one goal line and then the other, but crossing neither during the first half. The scoreboard was blank of figures when the whistle blew and the battered and weary players trotted off to the locker rooms.

John Heath was ignorant of the finer details of play, but he soon grasped the general idea of the game. During the play his eyes followed, not the ball, but one player—Raymond. And, for that matter, wherever the ball was Raymond was never very far from it. Heath saw him smashing head first into the line, running around the end, jumping to catch a pass, being tossed head over heels or tossing some one else. Time after time he heard the cheer leaders shrieking through their megaphones, "Short cheer for Condon. Make it good!" And the crowd made it good. It was hard to realize that it was his boy whose name this multitude was roaring to the skies. And strangely thrilling.

He sank down upon the seat beside the palpitating and husky Mr. Weeks, drew a full breath for the first time in fifteen minutes, and looked about him. Everywhere he caught mention of Raymond's name. They were all talking about

him. A young gentleman who had beaten his stiff hat into the shape of a concertina, cocked the concertina on his head and expressed his ecstasy to the world in general. "Isn't he a whale of a player!" he vociferated. "I say! Isn't he though!" And the attractive young woman sitting next to him squealed soulfully, "Oh, don't you just *love* him!"

The bands performed their evolutions and Lorenzo, who had been seated not more than thirty seconds during the first half, stood up again. Heath did not stand, he was looking at the people near him, looking and still listening. On the row of seats just below and a little to the right, sat a gray-haired man in a raccoon coat, who, as Heath glanced at him, happened to turn and look upward. Their glances met and Heath had the feeling that this man was some one he knew, or had known. The man, too, seemed to find the Heath face vaguely familiar. He did not bow, however, and after the brief exchange of looks, turned away again. Nevertheless, several times during the interval between the halves, Heath caught him looking in his direction. Yes, they must have met, this man and he, somewhere, at some time, but, if so, when and where? He was a distinguished-looking person, his clothes, his look and his bearing advertising prosperity and the habit of command. With him was a very pretty girl, a bunch of carnations pinned to the bosom of her mink coat. Once, after one of those backward and upward glances, the man spoke to her and she, too, turned and looked. She, at least, was a stranger; John Heath was sure he had never met her.

The field was cleared, the teams came on again, the whistle blew, the second half began.

It was that second half which furnished material for the big, black headlines in the Sunday papers. The third quarter ended, as had those preceding it, with the score 0 to 0. And then, at the beginning of the fourth and last—

John Heath couldn't have told just how it happened. He

learned the particulars by reading the papers next day. The home team—Raymond's team—had been pressed steadily back from the center of the field, but, at last, they held, the opposing side was forced to punt and the ball was caught and advanced to the twenty-three yard line on the return. There they lined up.

There was the usual thud of meeting bodies, the inevitable tangle of legs and arms, and then, from that tangle somewhere shot a flying figure. Strong arms reached to clutch it, but the clutches were evaded. The runner was clear for the moment and the terraced ranks on Heath's side of the field leaped up and howled. Up the field, ten yards, twenty, thirty, ran and dodged and squirmed the man with the ball. Between him and the far-off broad white mark with the goal posts at its center were but two players, a back, the redoubtable "Art" Cummings, and another, the little lithe, brainy quarter who was almost, if not quite, as famous.

Cummings was in the way, he was set for the tackle. The runner came flying to meet him, then swerved, swerved back, a straight arm shot out, Cummings was sent sprawling. Only thirty more yards to go, but there was the quarter, crouched, alert, hands outspread. He would get him. He was sure to get him.

Heath, howling with the rest, although not in the least aware of it, waited for the unescapable collision. But there was no collision. The runner dodged to the right, to the left, darted ahead. The quarter, thrown off his balance, plunged forward. The man with the ball leaped high in the air, stumbled, almost fell, recovered and went on. And now there was no one to stop him.

John Heath was in the midst of a lunatic asylum let out for noon. Roars, yells, pandemonium. Perfect strangers were pounding him on the back. He had, afterward, a vague remembrance of seeing the dignified man in the raccoon coat hopping up and down, bareheaded, his gray hair flying, both

arms flapping like those of a jumping jack, while the girl with him was hugging him about the waist as if she were trying to waltz.

His first clearly comprehended realization was that he was being strangled. The next that a round, plump, fiery red face was thrust into his and a husky voice was buzzing just under his nose; the face and voice of Lorenzo Weeks.

"O-ooh!" wheezed Lorenzo. "O-oh! Wow! *Whe-e-e!*"

Heath reached up and loosened the death clutch about his neck.

"Stop it! Stop it, you darn fool!" he panted.

Lorenzo stopped the garroting process because he was obliged to, but he wheezed on.

"Did you see him?" he croaked. "Oh, did you see him! Oh, my salvation! Oh, my mercy! O-oh, you *Raymond!*"

"Was—was that Raymond?" stammered Heath.

"Course 'twas Raymond! Who in tunket did you think 'twas? O-oh, you Raymond! Oh, thunderation! Oh, *hell!*"

Above the riot the megaphones shrilled.

"Regular cheer for Condon! Get it off your chest! One—two—three!"

They were on their way, a slow, crowded and noisy way, up the street leading from the Stadium. They were going, according to instructions, to Raymond's room to await him there. Ahead, behind and about them was the throng, some downcast and glum, the others riotous and jubilant. They were jostled and pushed, their feet were trodden upon, hoarse voices whooped in their ears.

Heath was happy, very happy, but he was calm. Lorenzo was happy, but, if his present behavior was any criterion, would never be calm again. He danced, rather than walked, and the crowd in their immediate vicinity were beginning to take notice.

"Attaboy, Joshuway!" cried one grinning youngster, hitting

im a tremendous thump on the back. "Can't lick the gang rom the old home town, eh?"

Lorenzo turned. He was still blinking from the effects f the thump, but his grin was broader than that of the umper.

"I'll tell 'em you can't!" he croaked, gleefully. "I said o in the beginnin'. I've seen that boy play football afore."

John Heath seized him by the arm and dragged him from ie street to the sidewalk, where he pushed him into a oorway.

"Stay here and smooth down, Lo," he ordered, grimly. You're a good clown, but the circus is over. We'll wait spell."

They waited for, perhaps, ten minutes. Then they walked n again. Lorenzo was, by this time, beginning to experience slight reaction. He was conscious of an increasing lame- ess in legs and shoulders and his voice had, apparently, one on a vacation.

They halted at the entrance of the old, gray-stone dormi- ory in the college yard.

"Here's the place, I guess," said Heath. "Now, Lo, we're oin' up to the boy's room. There's liable to be other folks iere. Let them do some of the talkin'."

Weeks opened his mouth, but what came from it was an sthmatic groan.

"Eh? What say?" asked Heath.

Lorenzo tried again. "Said I hadn't got nothin' left to lk with," he wheezed faintly.

"Fine! Come on then."

Raymond's letter had given the location of his room and ey found it without difficulty. It was empty when they ntered and, as they had been instructed to wait, they did so. eath walked about, looking at the books on the table and elves and the pictures and banners on the walls. Lorenzo, fter a brief tour of inspection on his own account, collapsed

in the battered armchair in the corner. The corridors outside were noisy with stamping feet, joyful shouts, laughter masculine and feminine. Occasionally the door was opened and some one looked in, but these individuals invariably departed without entering.

They had been there perhaps three-quarters of an hour when a clamor of excited voices and the sound of feet upon the stairs signaled the arrival of another party. Heath listened, one of the voices was familiar. Again he was aware of that peculiar thrill and the sudden quickening of the pulse which he had felt during the game. There was an odd shake in his voice as he spoke.

"Here they are," he said. "Now, Lo, behave yourself."

The door was flung open. Young Graves was the first to enter. With him was a middle-aged man, a young woman, and a boy of twelve or thereabouts. All were talking excitedly and the boy's voice was almost as badly damaged as Lorenzo's. Then came Raymond, holding back the door and ushering in another man and a girl. For an instant none of the group seemed to be aware that the room had other occupants. Charlie Graves was the first to notice. He stared at Heath. Then his bruised and swollen lips curled in a broad smile. He stepped over and extended his hand.

"Why, hello, Mr. Heath!" he exclaimed. "By George! I'm glad to see you—especially under the circumstances. Some game—what! . . . Oh, Raymond!"

But Raymond was at his side already. He, too, was battered and bruised, and one eye was in deep mourning; but he was in high spirits.

"Hello, Uncle John!" he shouted. "Got here, didn't you! Bully for you! Mr. Crocker come with you? . . . Eh? . . . Oh! Why it's Lo!"

Lorenzo came forward from the corner.

"How be you, Raymond?" he wheezed.

The man who had entered with Raymond had been gazing

at Heath since Graves first called attention to the latter. Now he walked briskly across the room.

"Is this John Heath, from Nauticook?" he demanded. "Is it? . . . By Jove! Yes, of course it is! Well, well, well!"

Heath looked at him. He was the gray-haired man in the raccoon coat who sat in the row below him at the stadium. And this girl—she was a very pretty girl—had been with him. His face had seemed familiar then, it seemed familiar now. But who—and where—?

The man's eyes twinkled. Then he laughed.

"Don't know me, do you?" he declared. "And I didn't know you there in the Stadium, though I kept feeling that I should. How is the old—what-was-her name?—*Sarepta?* And the foghorn dog? Have you picked up any more strays off the cod bank recently? . . . What? Ah, *now* you know!"

And John Heath did know.

"Why—well, I declare!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Hazen, how do you do?"

It was Samuel Hazen, the guest at the Inn, the New York banker whose motor boat he had towed into Nauticook harbor that foggy afternoon years and years before.

CHAPTER XI

THEY shook hands. Hazen introduced the pretty girl as his daughter, Ruth. "I remember telling you about her out there among the codfish," he said. "She was only a child then. Of course, between ourselves," with a wink, "she is yet, but she doesn't know it, that's all."

Ruth wrinkled her nose at him. "You are the child of the family, dad," she retorted. "If you had seen him at that game, Captain Heath, you wouldn't need any further proof. I was ashamed of him, truly I was."

"Ashamed! You should have gloried in it. When I saw that young fellow over there stand that quarterback on his head, I— But, say! he's your nephew, isn't he, Heath! Of course he is. Well, well, well! Shake hands again! How does it feel to be the uncle of the national hero? Look at him, Ruth. He isn't as swollen with pride as you might expect, is he?"

"Oh, he is used to it by this time, dad. Captain Heath reads the newspapers."

"Wait, my dear. Careful! You mustn't call him 'Captain.' He gave me fits for calling him that that day in the fog. I said it seemed to me that every third man in Nauticook was a captain and he said he was the fourth. Remember that, Heath?" with a chuckle. "I've never forgotten it. Ho, ho!"

"Cap'ns were thicker down there in those days, Mr. Hazen. Maybe now I mightn't be so fussy."

Ruth smiled. "Well, you have one captain in your family at least, Mr. Heath," she said. Her father laughed delightedly.

"I'll tell the world he has!" he crowed. "And a good one! That boy is—Oh, come here, Graves! You want to meet the perfect uncle of a perfect halfback, don't you? Of course you do!"

John Heath was introduced to the father of Charlie Graves, and to the young woman who was, it appeared, the latter's sister, the first of Raymond's collection of "peaches." The boy had good judgment, Heath decided. He also shook hands with the twelve-year-old youngster, her brother. All were bubbling over with enthusiasm. They were delighted to meet him because he was Raymond's uncle.

"And we don't want to forget that we have an All-American tackle among those present," announced Hazen. "Charlie, my boy, you're a wonder. The bulwark of the line—see all Sunday papers."

So the Graves hero and the Graves family were again congratulated. Everybody talked and the talk was all of the game and the victory. Heath did not talk as much as the rest and Lorenzo was left unheeded, in his corner. Raymond and Ruth Hazen dropped out of the general conversation and crossed to the window where they whispered together. Twelve-year-old Bobbie Graves hopped about, his freckled face one broad grin.

After a time Ruth left her partner by the window and, coming over, caught her father's arm. She whispered to him.

"Why, of course!" said Hazen. "Certainly, and glad of the chance. Heath, my daughter and I would like much to have you dine with us this evening. I want to hear more about the *Sarepta* and the fishing, all the news down your way. Say seven o'clock at our hotel—the Palmerson. Know where it is, don't you?"

Heath knew the location of the Palmerson Hotel, also he had read of its grandeur as the most fashionable and expensive hotel in the city. He shook his head.

"'Fraid I can't, Mr. Hazen," he said. "Much obliged, though."

"Why, of course you can. You must. We insist upon it, don't we, Ruth?"

"No. You see, Mr. Hazen, I haven't been with Raymond for quite a spell, and I'm goin' home to-morrow."

"What? Raymond! You don't expect to see Raymond *this* night, do you? Well, hardly! He's eating with the elect."

Raymond came forward. "I'm awfully sorry, Uncle John," he explained, "but the team and the coaches—the football crowd, you know—have a dinner to-night and then they take us to the theater. It's the regular thing at the end of the season. Didn't I write you about that? I meant to."

He had not written. John Heath swallowed his disappointment. Graves, Senior, chuckled.

"Do you remember your last football dinner, Hazen?" he inquired. "I remember mine—some of it."

"Ha, ha! Well, that was in the old days. Come now, Heath. Oh, I forgot!" with a glance and a somewhat vague gesture in the direction of Lorenzo's corner. "Your friend is with you, isn't he? You are included in the invitation, of course, Mr.—er—eh?—oh yes, Weeks. Glad to have you join us, Mr. Weeks."

Lorenzo, to whom scarcely a dozen words had been addressed since the arrival of the party, started, blinked and sat up in the chair.

"Eh?" he croaked, hoarsely. "Did—did somebody say somethin'?"

Heath said something and said it with uncompromising finality. There was a place for all things and, according to his estimate, the Palmerson Hotel was not the place for him nor Lorenzo Weeks. The slight change of tone and manner with which Hazen had mentioned Lorenzo's name had not

escaped his attention, but it had no effect upon his decision. His mind was made up before that.

"No, Mr. Hazen," he said. "It's all right, Raymond; you go along and have your good time. Don't mind Lo and me. We'll eat somewhere by ourselves and then walk around and see the sights. We're country, you know, and we'll enjoy 'em."

So, although Raymond seemed a bit conscience-stricken and the Hazens still expressed reluctance, it was settled in that way. Mr. Hazen and Heath shook hands at parting.

"This isn't good-by, you understand," declared the former. "I shall see you to-morrow; I'm counting on it. Raymond, you arrange an appointment with your uncle for me sometime in the forenoon, will you? I want to talk to you, Heath, about this young fellow's future. Has he told you about my plan for him?"

Heath hesitated. Raymond had said nothing to him, had written nothing, concerning any "plan." Nor had he, in any of his letters, mentioned the Hazen name. Yet the acquaintanceship could not be such a new thing; Ruth Hazen and Raymond surely must have met before, they appeared to be very good friends indeed. He looked at Raymond, but the latter had turned away.

"My train don't go till four o'clock, Mr. Hazen," he said, almost curtly. "Guess likely we can see each other before then."

"We must. This is important."

After the Hazens and the visiting members of the Graves family had departed Heath lingered, hoping for a word with Raymond. He soon saw that that word would not be spoken that evening. Charlie Graves was Raymond's roommate and he stayed. Then, too, the door was thrown open every few minutes to admit groups of whooping, congratulating classmates, some of them escorting parents and relatives anxious to meet the heroes of the day.

John Heath joined the weary and somnolent Lorenzo in his corner. He was introduced to a number of people, who shook his hand mechanically, muttered "How do you do's" quite as mechanical, and then turned to pat Raymond and Charlie on the back and tell them how very, very remarkable they were. He felt distinctly out of the picture.

After perhaps ten minutes of this he rose, dragged Lorenzo to his feet and led him to the door.

"So long, Raymond," he said. "See you to-morrow."

Raymond broke away from the back-patting group of the moment, and hurried after him to the corridor. He was brimming with apologies, he was awfully sorry. It was too bad, but of course his uncle saw how it was, etc.

"Now about to-morrow," he said. "Will you come over here to the room?"

"No. Guess you better come and see me. I don't know where we'll put up, but this is a big town and I guess likely we can bunk in somewhere. I'll phone after breakfast and give you steerin' directions."

"Will—will Lo be with you? How did you happen to bring him instead of Mr. Crocker, Uncle John?"

Lorenzo was farther along the corridor, so he did not hear the whispered question, nor the slight emphasis on the "him." John Heath's answer was quick, almost sharp.

"I've known him a whole lot longer than I have Seth Crocker," he said. "I brought him because I wanted to. Heave ahead, Lo! Good night, boy."

The search for lodgings was a lengthy one, but at last they engaged a furnished room in a private house which displayed a "Rooms to Let" sign in its window. They dined at a restaurant. Then Heath suggested that they "take in a show," but Mr. Weeks demurred.

"If it's all the same to you, Hi," he confided, "I guess likely I'd better not. I'm goin' to get enough Old Harry

from Huldy as 'tis, without havin' to tell her I've been to a play-actin' time."

"Oh, I see! Hum! So you're goin' to tell her everything you've done, eh?"

"Got to," dolefully. "She made me take what amounts to my Bible oath that I would. I had hard enough time to get out the house alive even along with that. . . . Huh? What are you grinnin' to yourself about?"

"Oh, I don't know. I was thinkin' how joyful she'd be when you told her what you said when Raymond made that touchdown."

"Eh? . . . Oh, my salvation! Did I say anything I shouldn't ought to? Did I? I—I vow I don't know *what* I said! I was about crazy, I cal'late. What *did* I say?"

"If you've forgot I shan't remind you."

They returned early. Lorenzo was more or less of a wreck by this time. He had been too excited to sleep much the night before, and, with the delirium of the afternoon added, his nerves were almost as badly frayed as his voice.

At ten the next morning Heath called Raymond on the phone. Yes, Raymond would be right over. He was planning to bring Mr. Hazen with him. Was that all right? He hoped so, because Mr. Hazen wished to talk with Uncle John about something very important. And, say—did Uncle John suppose he could get Lo out of the way during that interview? "He wouldn't understand, you know, and it isn't his business anyway."

"All right," was Heath's acknowledgment. "Bring Hazen if you want to. I'll attend to Lo."

There was little trouble in persuading Mr. Weeks to remain in the room. He had made an early trip to the corner news stand and returned with copies of every Sunday paper there on sale. He was anything but a rapid reader and had not as yet labored through the few pages of photographs and

print in one of these. So he was perfectly content to continue his reading and gloating.

John Heath descended to the lower floor of the lodging house and was given permission to receive his callers in the musty and faded drawing-room. He met them at the door and ushered them in. They conversed for a few minutes upon the all-important topic of the game. Hazen, it appeared, had been a football player in his college days and, as he expressed it, a "fan" ever since. He was an influential alumnus of his university—which was Raymond's, of course—keenly interested in its prosperity and activities and proud of its history.

"Practically every young fellow in my employ," he said, "wears the university ticket. And if he played football so much the better. It's a great game, Heath; teaches a man how to take hard knocks and grin, and grin and hand them back with interest. That's good training for a world like the one we have to live in, isn't it?"

He smiled, as he said it. Heath could not help wondering how many really hard knocks the world had handed this cheerful, self-confident, successful person who spoke of them so casually. Not many, he imagined.

"Seems so," he replied.

"It is. Well, this boy of yours has had the training. He's made good, too," with a chuckle; "I guess you'll agree to that. When I saw him play last fall I said to myself, 'That's the kind of stuff I need in my business. I'm going to keep my eye on this Condon fellow.' I said it to Ruth; she's a pretty sensible girl for her age, and this generation, even if she is my daughter."

Heath asked the question which had been in his mind since the previous afternoon.

"How long have you known Raymond, Mr. Hazen?" he asked.

"Oh, I met him first after the game last fall. Ruth and

he had met before that. Met several times, hadn't you, Raymond?"

Raymond, who seemed a trifle embarrassed, admitted previous acquaintance with the young lady.

"She was visiting Mrs. Seymour last spring at Commencement," he said. "I met her then, Uncle John."

"Um-hm. Mr. Hazen, you said somethin' yesterday about a 'plan.' Plan that Raymond was mixed up in, I judged 'twas. . . . Well?"

Hazen leaned forward. "Now I'm going to talk to you, Heath," he said. "I'm going to talk like a Dutch uncle. The Dutch variety versus the Yankee, eh? . . . All right. Don't interrupt me for a while, just listen."

John Heath listened. The plan, when it was revealed, was not the huge surprise which Hazen and Raymond evidently expected it to be. He had guessed the gist of what he was to hear. Hazen had taken a fancy to Raymond Condon. He took pains to explain that it was not Raymond's football genius alone which was responsible for the fancy. (Heath had his own opinion on this point, but he did not interrupt.) No, sir, he—Hazen—liked the boy. Liked him better every time he saw him. A young fellow like that deserved all the help he could get; he had earned his chance and he ought to have it. He wished the privilege of giving him that chance.

"I need a young man in my office. I have been looking for the right one for some time, and now I believe I've got him. When this nephew of yours graduates next spring let him come right over to New York and go to work for me. I am a banker and broker down town—member of the Stock Exchange—that sort of thing. Let me give your boy the start he ought to have. I don't think you'll be making a mistake, and I know I shan't. Now what do you say?"

Heath pulled his mustache. He turned to Raymond.

"What do *you* say?" he asked.

Raymond evidently had much to say, but he seemed to find the saying difficult.

"It's a wonderful chance, Uncle John," he blurted. "Anyhow, every one seems to think it is. I'm crazy to do it, of course, but I know you—"

"Wait a minute. Who is every one?"

"Why—why, Mr. Hazen and—and Ruth—and Mr. Graves—Mr. Hazen told him about it yesterday—and—oh yes, Mrs. Seymour. She thinks I shouldn't miss it for the world."

"Yes, yes. Does, eh? You've told her then. Why didn't you tell me? I'm liable to be more or less interested."

Raymond colored. "I—I was going to tell you, Uncle John," he stammered. "I should have told you pretty soon, of course. Only, you see—well, I was afraid you would be disappointed. I know you had planned for me to go with the Nauticook bank."

Hazen broke in once more. "Don't let him do that, whatever else you do, Heath," he urged. "He might get to be cashier—or even president some day, perhaps, but what of it? Let me give him the push up he ought to have. He wants to come with me, you can see that."

Heath could see it. Raymond's flush, his evident excitement, the expression upon his face, were evidences sufficient.

"Of course," continued Hazen, "I get your point of view, Heath. You were looking forward to having the youngster in the same town with you, living with you, all that sort of thing. The idea of having him over in New York, where you'll see him only once in a while, doesn't sound so good. I can understand that. Still, after all, it is the boy himself and his future you are really interested in, they are the big things. We fathers and uncles have to make sacrifices. We can't be selfish, now can we?"

"No."

"No, we can't. And I don't want you to get the idea that I am taking your nephew into my employ just to give him

a soft thing. He'll have to work hard and his advancement will depend on himself. All I'm offering is a chance for him and my personal interest. If he makes good—and I'm betting he will—I'll look after him. If he fails—well, there's always that bank job in the background. . . . Said enough for the present, have I? If you want more ask for it."

John Heath asked nothing. He pulled slowly at the cigar which Hazen had given him.

"I'll think it over," he said.

"That's right. Plenty of time between now and June. Well, Raymond, I must go now. Ruth and I are counting on seeing you both—oh yes, and—er—what's-his-name—your friend—at luncheon. Raymond, make him come this time."

Heath accompanied him to the door.

"When I've thought this out I'll write you, Mr. Hazen," he said. "Of course I'm much obliged for your interest."

"That's all right—my interest, too. I mean to get down to Nauticook again some of these summers. I liked that place."

Returning to the dingy drawing-room John Heath found Raymond sitting by the window. He looked troubled and rather ashamed.

"I don't want you to think I've been hiding all this from you, Uncle John," he began, hurriedly. "You see—"

"Wait. Have been hidin' it, haven't you?"

"Well, I—"

"Why have you never told me about meetin' this Hazen man—and the girl?"

"I don't know. When I first met him—them—I didn't realize that you and he knew each other. He didn't—I guess he didn't connect your name with the Heath who had brought him into port that day of the fog. Of course *I* didn't know about it. It was before I came to Nauticook."

"Um-hm, so 'twas. This plan of his though—you've known somethin' about that for quite a spell, I judge."

"Why, yes—but nothing definite at all, until very recently. Ruth wrote me that she and her father had talked about it."

"You and she write to each other, then?"

"Why—why, that's nothing. I write half-a-dozen girls and they write me. Writing doesn't mean anything."

"How much have you and Mrs. Seymour talked it over?"

"Not very much. She knows the Hazens, of course, and she heard about it. She is strong for it, Uncle John. I'll say she is! You ought to hear her."

"I most likely shall. But why was I kept in the dark? that's what I want to know."

"Why—why just because—I told you why, Uncle John. It was all in the air anyway, and I knew you wanted me to go with the bank. I should have told you. I was going to tell you now, while you were up here for the game. Honestly I was."

"You'd rather go with this New York man than hitch up with the Nauticook National?"

"There is no comparison. You don't realize what a chance Mr. Hazen is offering me, Uncle John. Everybody who has heard about it thinks it is wonderful. He is one of the leading financial men in New York City. He is known all over the world. Just think!"

"That's what I intend to do—think. . . . Umph. . . . Well, how is your studyin' gettin' along?"

Raymond professed to believe that it was getting along. Of course he would have to "plug" during the winter, but he would get his degree all right. His uncle was not to worry about that.

"Hope I shan't have to. When will I see you again?"

"Oh, pretty soon. I'll be down at Christmas sure."

"How about Thanksgivin'?"

"Oh, I forgot. Why, yes, I guess I'll be down then."

They parted a half hour later. The invitation to lunch with the Hazens was declined.

"No," said Heath, firmly. "I've got Lo on my hands."

"But Mr. Hazen said you must bring him, too. Don't you remember?"

"I remember," dryly. "I remember that better than he did Lo's name."

"Oh, Uncle John, you mustn't think— Mr. Hazen isn't a snob. He wants us. I tell you he does!"

"He wants you, I know."

"But he wants you, too."

"And Lorenzo?"

"Well—of course— Now, Uncle John, you know what Lo is. He's all right, in his way, but— Anyhow, Mr. Hazen asked him, and if he hadn't wanted him he wouldn't have asked. There's no make-believe about *him.*"

John Heath smiled. "Boy," he said, "did you ever hear why the darky stole the chicken feathers? He did it because he couldn't very well steal the chicken without 'em. You go ahead and eat with the Hazens. See you down home for Thanksgivin'—I hope."

He and Mr. Weeks took the afternoon train for Nauticook. Heath, who had said very little since his interview with Hazen and Raymond, was still not conversational. Lorenzo, however, a pile of Sunday papers in his lap and another on the floor at his feet, gabbled steadily and always about the football game.

"Wa'n't it the greatest thing ever you see in your life, Hi —the way Raymond galloped past them other fellers? . . . Aw," in huge disgust, "why don't you say a word once in a while?"

Heath roused from his reverie, blinked and turned.

"What do you want me to say?" he asked, indifferently.

"Say somethin', for salvation sakes! You never see a football game afore that one yesterday. Used to make out

you figgered football didn't amount to much. What do you think of it *now?"*

His companion sighed. "All nothin'," was his surprising comment.

"What! After your own relation gettin' himself more wrote up and printed about than the President of the United States! And you set there and say—"

"Oh, shut up! Don't bother me."

He felt a little better about it next day. It occurred to him that he had scarcely mentioned the victory to Raymond, had not joined the chorus of praise and congratulation. He had been very happy when he came to the boy's room after the game, had looked forward to telling the young man what he thought of him, shaking his hand, patting him on the back, expressing a little of his pride and jubilation. The Hazens and the Graves had done all this for him and, during the session in the room, he had not been afforded one moment alone with his boy. He had never before felt so much like an outsider. It hurt—an unreasonable hurt, of course, but nevertheless a real one.

And on Sunday, when for a little while the pair were alone, his mind was filled with the Hazen proposition. It —the proposition—was disturbing enough of itself, threatening as it did his own plans for Raymond's future; but the knowledge that it was no new thing, that it had been discussed by all these other people, and that he, one of the two most intimately concerned in it, was the last to be told—that had hurt more than anything else.

Why had Raymond said nothing to him about it? It set him to wondering how many other secrets were in the back of the young man's mind—secrets of which he, his uncle —no, his father— knew nothing whatever. Then he remembered his own boyhood. His mother, no doubt, was confident that she shared all her son's secrets. Youth was youth, now as then.

His conscience troubled him and he wrote Raymond a long letter praising him and his eleven and repeating the congratulations which the sporting section of Nauticook had poured into his ears. As for the Hazen offer, he wrote he was thinking hard about that. He was going to ask advice of Seth Crocker and others. Time enough. He and Raymond would have a long talk on Thanksgiving and others at Christmas.

He did consult with Crocker and, to his surprise, the bank president's counsel was unhesitatingly prompt. He was sorry, of course, in one way—he would have liked to have Raymond in the Nauticook National—but an offer like this one from a man like Samuel Hazen was altogether too good to be refused.

"If the boy belonged to me, John, I wouldn't hesitate a minute. Hazen is pretty near the top of the financial heap in this country. The bank will hate to lose Raymond and I know it will be tough for you to have him away from home, but you've got to think of what it means to him. We dads and uncles can't be selfish, eh?"

Susan Harwell's advice was much the same. Nothing could be more indicative of the great change in John Heath than the fact that he—the one-time woman hater—should ask for or value a woman's advice upon any subject whatever. Mrs. Conway Seymour's advice in business matters had at first been, so to speak, thrust upon him. Later her interest in Raymond had been so evident and so keen that he had followed it to the extent of sending the boy to college. During the college years he had valued her counsel, even sought it.

But now, since his acquaintance with Mrs. Harwell had ripened to a very real friendship, he had fallen into the habit of talking over his affairs with her. He and she talked of Raymond and Heath's plans for the latter almost every time they met. He could discuss with her troublesome

questions which he would never dream of discussing with Mrs. Seymour. Susan Harwell belonged to what Lorenzo called "everyday folks," just as he did.

And she, like Seth Crocker, was of the opinion that the Hazen offer should be accepted.

"I know how hard it will be for you to give him up, John," she said. "You've been counting on having him back with you, living with him in Nauticook, and seeing him every day and all the time. But, after all, is it you you ought to think of?"

"No, it isn't. I know that."

"I guess you do. I never saw anybody that thought less of his own comfort than you, where that boy is concerned. And it isn't his fault that he's got different ideas from yours and likes different things. You have—well, if you haven't encouraged him in it, you haven't stopped him. Maybe I shouldn't say that. I shouldn't if you hadn't said it in this very room, and more than once."

He nodded. "I know it," he admitted. "I used to think I was pretty hard-headed, but I ain't. I'm to blame, he isn't."

"Rubbish! Nobody's to blame. You want him to have the best there is and climb as high as anybody can; course you do. Well, here's the ladder set for his feet and somebody standing by to boost. What blame is there in that for anybody?"

He shifted uneasily. "Maybe there ain't any. I—Oh, I'm just jealous, I presume likely. I hate to think it ain't me that'll do the boostin'."

She sniffed indignantly. "You make me cross when you talk that way," she declared. "If any child ever owed more to his own father—let alone an uncle, or cousin, or whatever you are—than that boy owes to you I never heard of him. Some day he's goin' to realize it, even if he doesn't now."

"All nothin'! I don't care if he never realizes it. I don't

want him to cry over me. Oh, well, you and Crocker are right, of course. He'll have to go with Hazen; can't afford not to."

"Seems so to me. . . . There! I've talked the way a person with no child of her own always does. Never was a childless woman or man either, who couldn't tell the other person exactly what to do with theirs."

The subject was changed and they spoke of other matters. She mentioned receiving a letter from the lawyers engaged in settling the complicated affairs of the Silver Cross Society.

"They seem to think I'll get my check, or part of it, before the summer is over," she said. "However, they thought the same thing a year ago so I'm not spendin' any of Aunt Maria's insurance till it's in my hands."

At the door she referred once more to Raymond and his great opportunity.

"It's wonderful for him," she said, "and I'm glad for his sake. But I'm sorry for you, John—awfully sorry. I've always thought I could do a better job at runnin' a world than whoever's runnin' this one does, but I haven't been asked to try yet. Probably they think different in the manager's office."

During his walk home John Heath's thoughts were odd ones—for him. This woman had as much sense as a man—more than most men of his acquaintance. The disappointments of life—she had had more than her share of them—had not made her sour and resentful, as they had him, for example. He did not realize it, but a good deal of his own pessimism had slipped away since Raymond came. He could think of his wife now, and often did, without the shame and bitterness of fifteen years before. He could even find satisfaction in the thought that she had trusted him sufficiently to leave his son—their son—in his care. That trust had made life almost worth living—yes, it had. Raymond deserved every atom of good luck which had come to

him. And his father's mean little jealousies and disappointments should not stand in the way of that luck.

So the question was as good as settled that night. Long before spring it was definitely settled in every way. Raymond came down for Thanksgiving and the Christmas holidays. At Mid-Years he accepted, with his Uncle John's consent, an invitation from the Hazens to visit them in New York. Heath was invited there for the week-end, but he did not go. He did, however, meet Samuel Hazen in Boston and the pair had another, and conclusive, talk.

Heath went up to Commencement and saw, from a seat amid the assemblage, his boy, dignified in cap and gown, receive his parchment from the university. He saw him occasionally during the Commencement festivities. And, a few weeks later, they again said good-by on the platform of the Nauticook station.

This was, for John Heath, the hardest good-by of all. It meant—and he realized fully that it meant—the end of the old intimate relationship. Raymond, of course, was loud in indignantly proclaiming that it did not mean anything of the sort, but Heath knew. Characteristically he said very little, showed nothing of his feelings, and grinned pleasantly when the conductor called "All aboard."

"Well, so long, boy. Write often as you can. I'll want to know how you're gettin' on."

"Sure! And you write me, Uncle John."

"You bet!"

That was all.

CHAPTER XII

THIS was the longest summer yet and, in a way, the most disturbing since Heath gave up fishing and opened the shop on the main road. There was still repairing and cabinetmaking sufficient to keep him busy, but there was a marked slackening of trade with the summer people. Encouraged by his success of the past few years, he had that winter ventured to invest a good deal of money in rare and expensive articles of furniture, china and glass, and these were not selling as he had hoped.

The war in Europe was the reason, of course. The situation over there was acute, and the United States, although not yet actively involved, was no longer, except in name, an impartial bystander. Again and again the newspaper headlines proclaimed a crisis, but although each time the crisis passed without an explosion, it left behind it angry mutterings and resentful prophecies. There were all sorts of societies for the relief of the wounded, to aid the starving Belgians, to help this suffering people and that. Young Americans were enlisting in foreign flying or ambulance corps.

Mrs. Seymour's nephew, young Edwards, was a member of a French ambulance unit, recruited from the men of his and Raymond's university. Raymond, himself, had been eager to join and if Samuel Hazen had not strongly advised him to wait a while he might have done so.

The Nauticook chapter of the Red Cross held biweekly sessions and, as Mrs. Harwell reported, there were city women sewing there who, she was certain, had not threaded a needle before in their lives. Subscription papers were circulated, amateur dramatic performances were given, every

possible scheme for raising money for war charities was tried. It was a fine spirit, but it did not help the sale of rare antiques.

Heath could not help reflecting that it was fortunate there were no more college bills to be paid. Raymond was self-supporting, the salary he received as a beginner in the Hazen employ was—or so it seemed to Heath—very liberal. True, the boy in his letters occasionally mentioned that he was "up against it" for funds, but he mentioned just as often that he was having a swell time. The Hazens, father and daughter, had taken him under their wing and, judging by his casual references to this theater party or that dance, his evenings were thoroughly occupied. To offset this, however, he wrote enthusiastically of his work and seemed confident that he was making good in the banking house. A note from Hazen, received late in July, confirmed this optimistic statement.

Your nephew is ambitious and he has a head on his shoulders. He will do, I think. Well, I told you he would and I am a pretty good picker, generally speaking. How are things in Nauticook? Ruth and I hoped to get down there this season, but it looks as if I must stick pretty close to headquarters for the present. Too much war.

The domestic situation in Seven-up could not have issued quite as satisfactory a report. A crisis was approaching there also and, although John Heath was not aware of its imminence, a less particular person than he could not help noticing that the Weeks machine was not functioning as it should. Hulda, in spite of her many drawbacks as a household companion, had, until recently, cooked and cleaned to his satisfaction. Now she was neglecting the cleaning and the meals she prepared were sketchy, to say the most. She was absent from the cottage almost every evening and a good many afternoons, and, of course, her absence meant that of Lorenzo, also. She had yielded, under protest, to Heath's

insistence that her husband accompany him to the football game, but she had never forgiven him for instigating rebellion against her wifely authority. She was careful to make the rebel himself understand that, although freedom might be pleasant while it lasted, its consequences were sure to be disagreeable and last longer. She kept Lorenzo trotting at her heels from early morning until late at night.

The local branch of the Society of the Pure in Heart was having its troubles, just as the Come-Outers had had theirs, and for an almost identical reason. The Reverend Mr. Todd had had various successors and the most recent occupant of his pulpit was a man by the name of Jacobs. Mr. Jacobs had not been a parson all his life; he had been many things, among others a book agent and an insurance solicitor. He had the gift of gab, but with it a corresponding lack of discretion. He talked, not only in the pulpit, but too promiscuously outside of it. Some of his criticisms of the members of his flock reached the ears of the sheep most concerned. They bleated indignant protests. Too hasty denials and impromptu explanations by the shepherd did not help to restore peace in the fold.

The small congregation split into two factions, those in favor of Mr. Jacobs and those against him. Outsiders called them "Jakes" and "Anti-Jakes." The Jakes were determined that no one but the Reverend Jacobs should lead them. The Antis declared themselves quite contented to be led by any one else. Pure in Hearters no longer sang at their daily tasks. The Bethel's walls echoed words expressive of anything but brotherly and sisterly love. After a succession of stormy meetings the quarrel came to a vote. The Anti-Jakes won by a majority of three. Then the Jakes, led by their adored minister, marched out of the Bethel, promising never to set foot in it again. The Antis, momentarily forgetful of the state of the church exchequer, cheered their departure.

Hulda Weeks was a militant Jake. So, of course, was

Lorenzo, who had had no opinion of his own on any subject since his marriage. Hulda came home from that meeting sputtering like a damp firecracker. Her husband, dodging the sparks flying about his head, agreed with everything she said.

"And I suppose likely you think," sneered the lady, "that this is goin' to end Mr. Jacobs's preaching the Gospel in this town. Well, it ain't."

"You bet it ain't!" chimed in Lorenzo, fervently.

"Huh! What do you mean by that, I'd like to know? What are *you* cal'latin' to do about it?"

Lorenzo choked, swallowed and then meekly admitted that he didn't know's he could what you might call do anything.

"What can anybody do, dearie? They've hove us out of the Bethel."

"Hove nothin'! Nobody hove me out. I went out, when I got good and ready. I'd like to see anybody try to heave me out of anywheres."

"So'd I," agreed Lorenzo, with incautious enthusiasm.

"Eh? What? Well, never mind. If certain things come around same as they ought to, and same as I think they will—well, you'll see. The time may come—and pretty soon too—when I'll be somethin' besides other folks' dish-washer. Then those Antis'll learn a few things. Yes, and your precious Hi Heath'll learn 'em, too."

"Why—why, Huldy, what's Hi got to do with it?"

"Never you mind. . . . Be you figgerin' to set up all night, or are you goin' to bed afore mornin'?"

The time to which she referred came sooner than she expected; it came within a month. Her Denboro relative —the invalid with whom she had lived during her few years absence from Nauticook—died and Hulda fell heir to her worldly possessions. It was not a large legacy, amounting altogether to, perhaps, a thousand dollars in

money, and some furniture and household goods, but to Mrs. Weeks and her husband it seemed a great deal. The Reverend Jacobs and his little band of faithful had been holding evening and Sunday meetings at the homes of the members. This gave Hulda an idea, and she proceeded to act upon it. She did not disclose her project to Lorenzo until all preliminary preparations were made. Then she did and the disclosure left him very much agitated.

"Now don't argue about it," she commanded. "It's all settled. I've done my part, now you do yours. You have your talk with him this very night."

"But—but, Huldy, Hi ain't been so very busy up to the store this summer, all hands knows it. He'll say he can't afford it. Sure's you live he will."

"Maybe so. Probably he will say somethin' like that at first. I expect him to."

"You do? Well—well, what'll I say then?"

"You can say that he might 's well look for somebody else to keep house for him, because you and me are leavin' at the beginnin' of next week."

"But—but, lovey, you don't mean it, do you?"

"I do. . . . A body'd think you'd be glad and proud to have a home of your own. You tell him to-night, right after supper. I'll be listenin' at the door and if you need any help you can call me. *I'll* tell him—and glad of the chance."

So, that evening, as John Heath sat reading in the living room, a trembling and stammering Lorenzo entered from the kitchen and began a long and rambling discourse. Characteristically he began at the wrong end. Hulda, so he said, had come into consider'ble money; Hi knew about that, he cal'lated, most folks did. Well, and—and Hi knew about the fuss amongst the Pure in Heart folks, how dreadful mean Mr. Jacobs had been treated and how they wouldn't let him hold meetin's up to the Bethel no more. Well—well, Huldy

she vowed and declared she wasn't goin' to stand that, and so—and so—you see—

By this time he was so involved in a tangle of words, beginning and stopping and beginning again, that Heath, who could not imagine what it was all about, lost patience.

"There, there!" he broke in. "What's all this? What are you tryin' to say?"

Mr. Weeks coughed, stammered, fidgeted, began once more, became more involved than ever, and, at last, gave it up in despair.

"I—I don't know *what* I'm sayin'," he sputtered desperately. "I didn't want to say it anyhow, but Huldy she—she— Aw, Huldy, come on in here and help a fellow out, can't ye!"

Hulda came. The kitchen door was thrown open with a bang and she appeared. She gave her husband a glare which expressed her opinion of him as a messenger and then faced her bewildered employer.

"Mr. Heath," she said, "Lorenzo and me want more money."

John Heath looked at her. Then he closed the book he had been reading and laid it on the table.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I say that my husband and me want more money."

"Um-hm. So do most folks."

"We're goin' to have it, too."

"You're lucky."

"I mean—Lo, you go over there and set down; you've made mess enough of this already. Mr. Heath, for three long year my husband and me have been workin' and slavin' in this house, doin' our livin' best to keep you comf'table. It wouldn't be becomin', maybe, for me to say that we've done it. I don't say it. All I say is that I'd like to see anybody else do a better job."

She paused. John Heath said nothing.

"Independence is the free right of everybody on this earth," she went on, majestically. "A home of their own is what every self-respectin' soul craves for, or ought to crave for. You'll own up to that, I guess likely."

"Just as soon—if it'll save time."

"I've always counted myself self-respectin' and I've had my cravin's. Up to now I couldn't afford to satisfy 'em. I've had to sacrifice my independence for money. Now, the good Lord be thanked, the time's come when I can stop sacrificin'—if I want to."

Heath pulled at his mustache, but he made no comment.

"I've come into money of my own," Mrs. Weeks continued. "If I feel like doin' my own dishes instead of other folks's, I can. I've thought of it, and I've considered it. I've even gone so far as to get the refusal of a nice house in this town that I can live in for thirty dollars a month. It'll be my own, long's my rent's paid, and I can be just as independent there as I please."

Again she paused. Lorenzo, from his corner, added a word of explanation.

"You see, Hi," he interpolated, "Huldy figgers we could let out the front room couple of nights a week and Sundays and what we got out of that would help along with the rent. You see, the Jakes they want a place to hold meetin' in and—"

"*Jakes!* Well, of all things!"

"Eh? . . . Aw now, Huldy, I didn't mean nothin' out of the way. That's what folks call 'em."

"My own husband! The man I supposed was a pillar of the tabernacle, callin' his own church brothers 'Jakes'! . . . *Well!*"

Heath smiled. "Independence is great stuff, ain't it, Lo?" he observed. Then, turning to the statue of righteous indignation before him, he asked a question.

"What is this, Hulda? You and Lo givin' notice, is that it?"

Mrs. Weeks bridled. Her husband leaned forward anxiously.

"No, no!" he protested. "Course 'tain't. You ain't said your say through yet, have you, Huldy?"

"I have not. What I'm tellin' you, Mr. Heath, is what I've been thinkin' of, that's all. It ain't settled. The settlin'," with a determined nod, "depends on you."

"Um-hm. As how, for instance?"

The lady drew a long breath. "It depends," she said, with deliberate emphasis, "on whether or not you are willin' to pay my husband and me three dollars more a week apiece. We ain't, either of us had a raise of wages since I come into this house. If you see fit to give us what we're askin' for we'll stay here. Whether it's our duty, to sacrifice everything else, even for more money, is a question, but—well, we'll stay, Mr. Heath, for your sake. After all, you and Lorenzo have been together a long time. *That* weighs with me more'n anything else."

She had finished. The ultimatum was delivered. John Heath crossed his knees. He took his pipe from his pocket, filled and lighted it.

"When do you move to Independence Hall?" he inquired, casually.

"Why—why, *if* we go, it'll be first of next week. Of course," more graciously, "we're hopin' we shan't have to. If we was askin' somethin' unreasonable 'twould be different, but we ain't. We both think a lot of you, Mr. Heath. And," more graciously still, "we realize it would be dreadful hard for you to get along without us."

Heath's reply was in the form of another question, a most unexpected one.

"Could move to-morrow, or next day, couldn't you?"

"Why—why—"

"Guess likely you better. Good night, Huldy. Good night, Lo."

He rose, put on his hat, and walked out of the house. The Weekses stared at each other.

This was not quite the end, although it amounted to that. Lorenzo, using an errand at the grocery store as an excuse, visited the antique shop next day and he and John Heath had a final interview. The poor little fat man was almost in tears. Heath was sympathetic but firm.

"I couldn't afford to pay you and your wife an extra cent, Lo," he declared, "even if I thought you earned it, which I don't. As a matter of fact I've been wonderin' how much longer I ought to keep two people to do the work for me. No, you and Hulda have got your chance now and you'll have to take it. I wish you luck."

"But I don't want to take it. Don't you see, Hi? I—I'll feel so queer livin' anywheres but along with you at Seven-up. Seem's if I just couldn't do it."

"Oh well," with a smile, "you'll have a home of your own, you know."

"*My* own! Don't talk so dumb! A fellow that's put into jail don't go around braggin' that he owns the place, does he? I won't own nothin' in that darned house, not so much as a stick of furniture—even that's Huldy's."

"You'll be workin' for yourself, that's somethin'."

"Oh, salvation's mercy! *How* you talk! When I ain't slavin' for her I'll be diggin' in makin' things comf'table for them everlastin' Jakes. Yes, and Jacobs himself will be struttin' around givin' me orders and firin' my sins at me. Oh, I know him! 'Twill be 'Lo, you do this' and 'Lo, don't you know it's wicked to do that?' from mornin' till night. Honest, seems sometimes as if Huldy thought consider'ble more of that hollerin' minister than she does of me."

"Ain't gettin' jealous, are you, Lo?"

"Jealous!" Mr. Weeks breathed heavily. "No," he said,

after a moment, "I ain't jealous, that's the last thing I'd be. Hi, you're a smart man, if you only knew it."

"Um-hm. Trouble is I don't know it."

"Well, you be. A fellow that's lived long as you have without gettin' married is smart enough—to run a hotel. How did you manage to keep away from the women all these years?"

Heath did not answer. Lorenzo, crushed and dispirited, left the shop a few minutes later.

"Hi," he said solemnly, at parting, "Huldy seems to cal'late that you're a lost sinner—maybe you be, I don't know. And she keeps sayin' you'll get your come-up-ance in the next world—maybe that's so, too. But, anyhow, you ain't gettin' it ahead of time. I used to lay awake nights worryin' how I was goin' to keep out of Tophet. Now, by mercy, what worries me is how to *get* out of it."

Mrs. Weeks, her personal belongings and her spouse, moved from Seven-up on Saturday. Lorenzo was too glum to say good-by, but his wife said it and much more. She expressed her opinion of John Heath, his wickedness and his evil influence upon her husband, in plain, if not grammatical English. She was happy to shake the dust of that home from her feet, she declared.

Heath received this announcement with equanimity. "There's plenty to shake," he observed and closed the door. So, he reflected, ended another chapter of his biography. He was alone again, quite alone, if not in the world, at least in his home. It would seem strange for a time. He would miss poor blundering, chattering Lorenzo very much indeed, but perhaps it was for the best that matters had shaped as they had. It was quite true that payment of the Weeks' wages was more than he could afford just now. Business was bad, very bad. Here was an opportunity for retrenchment in his everyday expenses. Getting along without a housekeeper might be difficult but he meant to try it for the present.

He arranged with Mr. Rogers, mine host at the Wayfarers' Rest, to take all his meals at that far from sumptuous hostelry. He did not look forward to beef stew on Monday, pork chops on Wednesday, fried fish on Friday, and baked beans every Saturday with eagerness—there was a monotonous regularity in the unvarying routine of the Rogers bill of fare which did not appeal—but he was not over particular. And, at home, he could make his own bed each night and do the necessary sweeping and cleaning on Sundays. What he lacked in bodily comforts would be more than compensated by the cheapness of the arrangement.

When he called that Saturday evening at the Bangs cottage he said nothing about the great change in his domestic affairs. Miss Rebecca Carver, who taught school in Middleboro, and was a cousin of Mrs. Bangs, was visiting there and, early in the evening, the Congregational minister called. So, for an hour or so, the conversation was pitched upon a more lofty plane than was customary and the petty news of Nauticook was scarcely mentioned. About nine, however, the minister said good night and, a few minutes later, Mrs. Bangs also said it and went to her room, under Miss Carver's escort. Susan Harwell and Heath were left alone in the little parlor.

He rose and announced that he guessed he had better be going, too. Mrs. Harwell asked why he was in such a hurry.

"Nobody sittin' up for you down there at your house, is there?" she asked.

"No. . . . No, I guess not."

"You'd be surprised if there was, wouldn't you?"

"Eh? Why, what do you mean?"

She looked at him, gravely, but with that twinkle in her eye which he had learned to regard with suspicion. Suddenly she smiled.

"John Heath," she said, "you know perfectly well what I mean."

"Eh? No, I don't."

"You do, too. What are you goin' to do, now that that precious Weeks woman has marched out, with her husband under her arm? You ain't plannin' to live there all sole alone, are you?"

He pulled his mustache. "Hmph!" he grunted. "So you've heard about it already."

"Don't be silly. If there is any one from one end of this town to the other who hasn't heard about it they must be dead. Don't you know that Hulda has been makin' proclamations from the housetops, as the sayin' is? She has talked a steady string ever since you and she had what she calls an understandin'. She's done all she could to advertise, short of tackin' up a notice in the post office."

"Hmph!"

"Yes, indeed. She's told all the world and Nauticook that she has slaved and bemeaned herself long enough cookin' and keepin' house for a free thinker and an abandoned sinner who gloried in his sin. She vows she set still and watched her poor husband suffer under your wicked influence until she just couldn't do so any longer."

"The sittin' still part is all right; they've both of 'em done more of that than anything else, lately."

"Well, it's over and done with now, the powers above be thanked—that's what she says."

"I'll agree to that, too."

Mrs. Harwell laughed aloud. "John Heath," she ordered, "you sit down, yourself, right in that chair, and tell me all about it. I'm not so dreadful surprised. No one but you would have stood her as long as you have. Now tell me the whole story."

He hesitated, then took the chair she indicated.

"Mind if I smoke?" he asked. "If I'm goin' to talk Hulda

Weeks I'd like somethin' to take the taste out of my mouth."

She heard the story with interest and much amusement.

"You're clear of them, at any rate," was her comment. "Now who have you got in mind to work for you?"

When he announced his intention of getting along without a housekeeper, for a time at least, she was indignant.

"You can't do any such thing," she vowed. "I never saw a man yet who could keep house fit for a Christian to live in."

"I'm a heathen. Ask Hulda."

"Rubbish! Now you put another advertisement in the *Item*."

He shook his head.

"Why not? It's what you did before. And you came precious near gettin' a housekeeper—a real one, if I do say it."

"No. Can't afford it."

"Can't afford what—the ad or the housekeeper?"

"Either one. All these war doin's are raisin' hob with trade and I need every nickel to pay my bills."

She protested, but he was firm. At last she said, "Well, it's too bad. Of course I know what the real trouble is. You've spent every spare dollar you had put by to pay Raymond's college bills and the like of that. He's doin' pretty well over there in New York. Seems as if he ought to be savin' somethin' out of the wages he gets. Why don't you hint that he pay you back a little bit?"

"No," gruffly.

"There, there! Don't be cross. I am sure he had a lot rather do it than have you eat at the Rest and make up your own bed. I've a good mind to write him myself and tell him what a scrape you're in. He and I know each other pretty well by now."

This was true, they did. During the past few years, during those portions of his vacation which Raymond had spent in Nauticook he and Mrs. Harwell had become well acquainted. He had first met her during one of her infrequent

calls at Seven-up and had several times accompanied his Uncle John when the latter dropped in at the Bangs cottage. They had often discussed college and college affairs and she was gratifyingly willing to listen when he talked football. He approved of her.

"She's got sense, Uncle John," he declared. "It's a darned shame that you didn't get her for your housekeeper, as you planned. *She* wouldn't have put cider in the pudding sauce."

But to Susan's suggestion that she write Raymond, telling of his uncle's present domestic predicament, Heath's answer was even more gruffly in the negative.

"No," he said.

"All right. I'll mind my own business—only you needn't bite my head off. I tell you what I shall do though: I shall go down to that house some afternoon pretty soon and see what kind of a pigsty you are livin' in."

"Won't be anybody to let you in."

"I'll get in. Don't tell me you lock the door, because I know better. Nobody locks doors in Nauticook."

One evening of the following week John Heath, after a lonely and not too appetizing supper at the Rest, entered the living room at Seven-up and found a surprising change in its appearance. The furniture was in place, every piece of it; the window shades were evenly drawn; the rugs had been beaten; the lamps were filled. In his bedroom he found his wash pitcher and bowl clean and shining; the bed linen had been changed and the bed was neatly made; there was fresh soap in the soap dish and clean towels on the rack.

He made a thorough inspection and drew his own conclusions. Then, after a wash and a change of collar and tie, he walked straight to the little house on the South End Road. Susan, herself, answered his knock. Mrs. Bangs, he learned, was in her own room, where Miss Carver was reading aloud to her.

When they were seated in the parlor she began the conversation with a remark about the weather. He nodded.

"Yes," he said, "it's been a nice day and I shouldn't wonder if to-morrow was just as good. If you've got any ideas about the day after that I'm willin' to say that they're probably right. Does that satisfy you?"

She burst out laughing. "What in the world—?" she demanded.

"Just tryin' to get the weather report out of the way, that's all. If you haven't got any other prophecies to make I want to talk about somethin' else. Did you have a good time this afternoon?"

"Why, what do you mean?"

He shook his head. "Come, come! Susan," he said. "Nobody can look as innocent as you do and not be guilty. It must have taken you all of three hours to scrub and sweep and clean up down to my place. What did you do it for?"

For an instant she struggled to preserve the expression of injured innocence. Then, with a laugh, she surrendered.

"How did you know I did it?" she asked.

"Saw your trademark soon's I opened the door. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Not a bit. I told you that I should stop in there some day and see how you were makin' out. I did—and I saw."

"Um-hm. I recollect you told me you wanted to see the pigsty."

"It wasn't as bad as that, but it was a pretty fair sample of a man's housekeepin'. It looked better when I got through with it, or I thought it did."

"You thought right. Well, the pig's much obliged. Only don't do it again, that's all."

She tossed her head. "I shall do it again," she declared. "And again after that. I'll do it just as often as I see fit."

"Now, listen—"

"No, I shan't. You listen till I finish. I did have a good

time at that house of yours. I had the whole afternoon on my hands and I never was one to keep my hands folded. It wasn't the least bit of trouble and I enjoyed doin' it. I'm goin' to do the same thing my next afternoon off. Now don't be foolish, John Heath. Heavens and earth! how long had you used those towels on your washstand?"

He grinned, but he was troubled, nevertheless.

"Susan," he protested, "you can't keep on comin' down there. Don't you see you mustn't?"

"I saw I must. One look at those towels proved it, if nothin' else did. How are you goin' to stop me? Man alive, do you *like* a pigsty?"

"Not especially, but—"

"I tell you right now that I don't like to have any friend of mine come straight from one to sit in my clean parlor. I may be fussy, but I draw the line there. . . . Oh, be sensible! What do you suppose Raymond would say if he knew you slept in a bed a whole week and never changed even a pillow case?"

He shifted uneasily. "You mustn't think I don't appreciate what you did and want to do," he said. "It's only that—well, darn it, if you keep runnin' down there, now that there's nobody around, folks are goin' to talk. They're bound to."

She straightened in her chair. Her eyes flashed.

"Indeed!" she exclaimed. "Is that it! I am surprised! Didn't you tell me, that first time we met, over in South Wellmouth, that folks in this town called you 'queer' and talked about you? If I recollect right, you said then you didn't care how much they talked."

"Well—well, I don't—about me. But I won't have 'em talkin' about you."

"My soul! I believe that's the silliest thing you've said yet. I'll lose my temper pretty soon, if you keep on. Do you suppose I've lived as many years as I have without bein' talked about? If I had I should think there must be

somethin' the matter with me. Decent people won't talk and the other kind will, anyhow. Truly, I should think you and I were a couple of eighteen-year-olders that had to be watched because they couldn't be trusted alone. That's enough of *that,* John Heath."

He took a new tack.

"I'm not goin' to have you, or anybody else, do my work for nothin'," he declared, doggedly. Rather to his surprise she did not object to this.

"That's better," she said, with a nod. "*That* I can understand. It's ridiculous, of course, but, you bein' you, I can understand it. Well, suppose you paid me two or three dollars a week for comin' in—say, every third day for an hour or two—and straightenin' things up; would that plane off some of the bumps on your conscience?"

"How could you do that? Mrs. Bangs hires all your time, doesn't she?"

She explained her meaning. Miss Rebecca Carver, it seemed, had lost her position as teacher in the Middleboro school. She was tired and her nerves were not too strong and her doctor had suggested that she "take it easy" for six months or a year. Mrs. Bangs, who was fond of her, had urged her to remain there in that house for the winter, at least.

"She's a capable woman," Susan went on, "and she is one of the kind who won't sit down and let other folks wait on her. She will do, I know, at least half of the work around this house and about all of the takin' care of that Mrs. Bangs needs. I spoke to Mrs. Bangs about it this very mornin'. I told her that seemed to me, the thing she ought to do is let me hunt up another place. She wouldn't hear of that, because she and I like each other—anyway I like her—and she says that Rebecca isn't goin' to stay always and what would she do afterwards if I wasn't on hand. Then I said that it wasn't right for her to pay me as much as she had—

while Miss Carver was here, I meant—and that I intended to see if I couldn't find some sort of a part-time job that I could work at some of the week. She finally agreed that I could do that, if I wanted to. . . . There! Now, John Heath, I'm askin' you to give me that sort of job, provided you believe I'm likely to be satisfactory. If you do think that way we can go ahead and talk wages."

The argument did not end here, there was a good deal more of it, but at last it was agreed that Mrs. Harwell was to call at Seven-up two—or possibly three—afternoons of each week and put the rooms in order. For this service Heath would pay her what seemed to him a ridiculously low wage.

"But I don't like the idea of this business bein' talked over and lied over any better than I did at the beginnin'," he grumbled. "If there is another such stubborn person in this world I shouldn't know where to look to find him—or her."

"Look in the glass when you get home. . . . No, don't—let me have a chance to wash it first."

So again there was a decided change in John Heath's domestic arrangements and this one seemed likely to prove more satisfactory than any preceding it. The meals at the Wayfarers' Rest were pretty bad, but they were endurable, and the cleanliness and order at Seven-up were refreshingly pleasant. Business at the store and shop did not improve and most of the expensive pieces in which he had invested during the previous winter remained unsold at the end of the summer season. He began to think seriously of taking up fishing once more, for a part of his time at least. The cod were likely to bite, the European war would not scare them off as it had his customers. He did not write Raymond of his financial worries, nor did he mention them to any one in Nauticook, with the exception of Susan Harwell.

He and she saw more of each other now. Her afternoons at Seven-up were those of Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday,

and, sometimes, when he had grown weary of puttering with the few small jobs which came his way, he would lock up early and walk down to the cottage for a chat with her.

They talked of Raymond a great deal. He seemed to be getting on remarkably well and a second letter from Samuel Hazen was even more reassuring than the first. Any remaining doubts in Heath's mind as to whether or not he had done the right thing in permitting the boy to seek his fortune under the patronage of the New York banker were practically dispelled. He showed Raymond's letters to Susan and she, too, rejoiced in his success.

"He is a born money-maker, there's no doubt of that," she said. "You can see how interested he is in all these stocks and bonds and the 'market' he is always tellin' about. He will probably be rich before he dies. Who does he inherit all this from, John? Was his father a smart man about such things?"

Heath smiled. "Not so's you'd notice it," he replied, with incautious candor.

"Is that so? Then perhaps it is his mother he takes after. What sort of a woman was she?"

"Eh? . . . Oh, I don't know. . . . What's the latest from the Pure in Hearters? How's Hulda makin' out with that home of her own these days? Last time I saw Lo he seemed to cal'late 'twas more Jacobs's home than 'twas anybody else's."

"John, why have you never told me about Raymond's people? Nobody seems to know much of anything about 'em. Raymond doesn't himself; he remembers his mother, but not his father at all. He told me once that he had never heard of you until he met you there in that Boston hotel. That was just after his mother's death. He told me that he never remembers hearing her mention your name."

"Um-hm. Probably not."

"That seems funny. And yet she left him in your care,

didn't she? And you only a cousin, or somethin' like that. She must have had a wonderful trust in you."

His answer was a curt "Maybe" and that was all. She did not pursue the subject. That there was some mysterious secret concerning Raymond's parentage and John Heath's connection with the family she had long ago surmised. She noticed that, while he often spoke of his own mother and of his boyhood in Nauticook, had told her many stories of that time, not one had he told of those years when he was absent from the town. Where he had been, what he had done, why he had returned—all these questions remained unanswered. Whenever she dropped a hint his mouth closed tightly.

This was the more remarkable because he was not in the least secretive about his other affairs. Their conversations nowadays were intimate and confidential. He told her on one occasion that she was the only person in Nauticook with whom he felt he could speak "straight out" and did so speak. She had told him her own life story, of her girlhood, her marriage and her brief married life. The latter, she divulged, had not been altogether happy. Her husband drank more than was good for him.

"If he hadn't he might have been alive to-day," she said. "He'd been drinkin' when he left port in that vessel he was lost overboard from. . . . There! I don't know why I told you that. I've never told any one else, not even Aunt Maria when she was alive."

His mouth set grimly. "Don't see what excuse *he* had for drinkin'," he observed.

"I'm afraid he didn't need any. . . . Oh, of course you don't understand. You've never been a drinkin' man yourself, so you can't realize how it gets hold of you."

He looked at her oddly. "Maybe I do," he said. "Don't be too sure."

"John, you mustn't ever mention what I've said to a livin' soul, will you?"

"No."

"I know you won't. You're a comfort that way."

She was a comfort to him, in the same way. He was beginning to realize that her companionship was the one great solace for Raymond's absence. He was lonely, but she was making the loneliness bearable. In the back of his mind was the half-formed dream that perhaps some day—in the future, of course—he might tell her the whole truth about Raymond. He could ask her opinion as to whether or not he should ever tell Raymond that he was his father. She would keep the secret and—well, she would know what was best to do.

In the course of one of their interviews she mentioned that she had had a letter from the attorneys representing her interests with the Sons and Daughters of the Silver Cross.

"They seem to think that I may get two or three thousand dollars of Aunt Maria's insurance almost right away. Well, I can use it. Maybe I'll ask you to invest it for me, John."

"Better not. I've got a dozen or so investments up in my shop this minute that are losin' considerable more interest than they're payin'. . . . Say, Susan?"

"Yes?"

"You're gettin' this money wouldn't—er—change things—er—too much for you, would they? You wouldn't be clearin' out—leavin' Nauticook—anything of that sort, eh?"

"Why—why no, I—I guess not. Not right off anyhow. Why?"

"Nothin'."

Labor Day came and went. With it went the usual flock of summer guests. That month was the dullest September Heath had known since he went into business. He considered more than ever the idea of taking up fishing as a means of earning more money. By the first of October the idea had become a determination. He was overhauling the ancient *Sarepta* in his spare time.

On the first Monday in the month he stopped in at the post office. In his box was a short letter from Raymond and another with a typewritten name and address. He read Raymond's note then and there. It seemed to him not quite as cheerful as usual. The young man was getting on very well, in fact he had just been given a more responsible position in the Hazen office and there was the prospect of a raise in salary. But, nevertheless, in spite of this good news, the tone of the letter was less buoyant and at the end was a sentence or two which John Heath could not but find puzzling.

"I may write you again within a day or two. Uncle John, you remember you always say that I can count on you. I am betting on that."

Heath pondered over this on his way to the Wayfarers' Rest and, in fact, at intervals during the afternoon. It was not until he reached Seven-up after supper that evening that he remembered the other letter in his pocket. He took it out and glancd at the printing in the upper left-hand corner of the envelope.

"If not delivered in five days return to The Home Savings Bank, Brayton, N. Y."

He tore open the envelope.

CHAPTER XIII

ENCLOSED in the envelope was a single sheet with the name of the bank printed at the top and, below it, the following typewritten note.

John Heath,
Nauticook, Mass.

DEAR SIR:

We are endeavoring to ascertain the present whereabouts if living, of Ralph Condon, son of Ralph and Ella Condon, who were residents of this town during the years 1894 and 1895, but who moved away early in 1896. Mr. and Mrs. Condon are, we have learned from reliable sources, both dead, and the son was last heard from in Coleville, Ohio, in 1904, or thereabouts. He left there in that year and we have not been able to trace him. Recently, however, we have made another attempt and your name has been given us as a possible source of information. Any help you may be able to give us will be appreciated. If the said Ralph Condon, Junior, is living it will be distinctly to his advantage to communicate with us immediately. If not living, his heirs will benefit.

Yours truly,
FRANKLIN G. PENTLOCK, Cashier.

John Heath's feelings, as he read this brief epistle, were peculiar. The name "Brayton" on the outside of the envelope had seemed vaguely familiar to him when he first saw it. Now he knew why. Brayton was the town in New York State where his son, Raymond Condon, was born. He was born there on the fifth of May, 1893.

But Raymond was Raymond, not Ralph Condon, Junior. He read the letter a second time.

"Son of Ralph and Ella Condon."

Yes—well, that was what Raymond was supposed to be, of course.

"The son was last heard from in Coleville, Ohio, in 1904. He left there in that year."

Raymond certainly. It must be Raymond these bank people were trying to locate. The "Ralph Condon, Junior" was a mistake. Probably—assuming Ralph Condon to be his father—they had guessed that the boy was named for him.

"Will be distinctly to his advantage . . . heirs will benefit."

That sounded like money . . . property of some kind, an inheritance, perhaps. He knew that Ella had had no near relatives, but of Condon's family he knew nothing. It was barely possible that some one of these had left some small property or sum of money and the Brayton bank was trying to find the heirs. His jaw set stubbornly. If this was the case it was no concern of John Heath or John Heath's son. Raymond should never accept a dollar from that source if he could prevent it.

He sat there in the rocker by the center table, frowning and considering. The thing annoyed him, irritated him, worried him. Little by little, during the years, the memories of the old disgrace, disillusionment and heartbreak had been fading, he seldom thought of them. Now this fellow, this Pentlock, whoever he might be, was dragging them into the light again, forcing him to think. He resented it.

His first inclination was to ignore the letter altogether, never mention it to Raymond at all. Throw it in the fire, get rid of it.

He did not, however. The more he pondered and considered the more he found himself forced to the unwelcome conclusion that he must answer it. Under ordinary circumstances the obvious procedure would be to send it on to Ray-

mond in New York and let him handle the affair as he saw fit. Raymond was a man now and competent to attend to his own business.

But the circumstances were far from ordinary. Raymond knew nothing of his mother's history. If he were to get into communication with these people, if it became necessary to establish his identity and he went—as he very likely might feel that he should do—to Brayton, he might learn enough to arouse his curiosity and suspicions. There was a risk certainly.

And, to ignore or destroy the letter, would not—provided there really was any worth-while inheritance of money or property involved—prevent the search being pushed in other directions. If Condon and Ella Heath were traced to Fox Harbor, then the whole truth would come out. The papers there would pounce upon it, advertise it; he remembered the Fox Harbor daily only too well. The news would travel to Nauticook eventually, it was sure to.

How in the world did this Pentlock and his confounded bank come to connect him, Heath, with the Condons? Coxley must have talked, of course. Doddering old idiot! He could not keep his mouth shut in spite of his solemn promise.

With forebodings, and the conviction that he was inviting trouble, rather than averting it, he wrote his reply that evening. It was curt and noncommittal.

Yours received. I do know something about a Ralph Condon, who lived in Brayton at one time. There was a son, but his name was not Ralph. He may or may not be the one you are writing about. Before I give you any information about him I should like to have more from you. Why do you want to know? What is this advantage you hint at? What do you know about the Condons, all of them? And how did you come to write to me?

Yours truly,

JOHN H. HEATH

He posted this note at the post office next morning. He wrote Raymond a long letter that day but he did not mention the communication from the Brayton bank. Nor did he mention it to Susan Harwell, when he found her, busy at her house cleaning at Seven-up late that afternoon. They talked of many things and many people, including Raymond, but Heath said nothing of the letter in his pocket.

Pentlock's second letter came early in the following week. It was a very long one this time. Mr. Pentlock explained and particularized. He was, so Heath gathered from the tone of the letter, a very conscientious and meticulous individual, who took himself and his position as cashier of The Home Savings Bank very seriously indeed. He explained that he had been called to that position from a similar one in a bank in a neighboring town. The former cashier, his predecessor, whose name it seemed was Fairweather, had resigned after forty years in the service of the Brayton institution. Mr. Pentlock, when he took charge, found the records and accounts of The Home Savings Bank in a condition far from satisfactory. He did not say this in so many words, but he intimated it in a good many.

I find [he wrote] a number of small accounts upon our books which have been inactive for long periods, accumulating interest, and which I am anxious to clear away, if possible. Among them is an account in the name of Ralph Condon, Junior. It was opened in June, 1894. Small deposits were made thereafter at intervals, the last date being July 10, 1896. Since then none has been made, nor have there been any withdrawals. As I said in my former letter, we have been endeavoring to trace the Condon family for some time. We succeeded, at last, in tracing Mrs. Condon and a son, presumably the child in whose name the account was opened, to Coleville, Ohio. Our correspondents there, the Coleville Dollar Savings Institution, have, at my request, been looking into the matter, and they report that a Mrs. Ralph Condon, a widow, resided in Coleville for a time, that

she died there in 1904, and that her son, then a boy of eleven or thereabouts, went away soon afterwards, being taken in charge by a relative somewhere in Massachusetts. The person most intimately connected with the Condons was a clergyman by the name of Coxley. He is now dead, but our correspondents have learned that the Condon boy left Coleville in his company and did not return. They have also ascertained that, for some years after the boy's leaving, Mr. Coxley was in correspondence with a John Heath of Nauticook, Mass., and, from some things he is remembered to have said, it was inferred that this person was the relative above mentioned. Therefore I wrote you and am writing you now.

The account upon our books stands in the name of Ralph Condon, Junior. I note you say that the Condons of your acquaintance did have a son but that his name was not Ralph. Are you certain of this? Although the Condons—there was but one family of that name—during their residence here seem to have had few intimate friends, I have been able to locate and question several persons who remember them and knew them slightly. These persons are agreed that there was but one child, a baby. One old lady whom I questioned seems certain that the child was born in Brayton.

All this, of course, can and will be looked into more fully. Mr. Fairweather, our former cashier, is the most likely source of information, but he is eighty-one years of age and his health has not been good for some time. He is now living with his married daughter in Boston. I hesitate to write him and put him to the annoyance of writing me. I shall not do so, in any event, until I hear again from you or, provided you are in touch with them, any surviving members of the Condon family. The account, with accrued interest, now amounts to several hundred dollars which, upon satisfactory identification, we shall be only too glad to pay to the proper claimant.

Kindly let me hear from you at your earliest convenience.

This long-winded and somewhat pompous epistle, which John Heath imagined to reflect something of the writer's personality, concluded with a postscript.

P.S.

It has occurred to me that you, yourself, might wish to

communicate with Mr. Fairweather. He can very likely give you particulars concerning the Condon family, the opening of the account, etc. His memory is said to be very good, I am told that he prides himself upon it. He is, as I have said, an elderly man, something of an invalid and his ideas are decidedly *not* those of a modern banker. He might, therefore, be more inclined to inform you concerning past happenings in this institution than he would be others—myself, for instance. A letter addressed to Oscar A. Fairweather, care Mrs. Henry Somers, 1103 Duncan Street, Brookline, Mass., would reach him, I am sure.

In spite of his feeling of angry resentment toward the whole affair, Heath could not help smiling when he read this postscript. He fancied that Mr. Oscar Fairweather, upon retiring from the cashiership of the savings bank, had expressed his candid opinion of the new incumbent and the latter's "modern" methods. His amusement was short-lived, however. Coxley had talked, just as he surmised. And those Coleville "correspondents" of Pentlock's had been busy. The thing must be stopped somehow.

He had been doing a great deal of thinking and guessing and speculating during the interval between the posting of his own letter and the receipt of this one. The name "Ralph Condon, Junior" still puzzled him. That it was a mere error or assumption was not an entirely satisfactory explanation. He had wondered if it were possible that there was a second child, a son born a year or so after Raymond's birth, whose father was Ralph Condon. Possible but not probable, because, even if this child had died in infancy, Raymond would almost certainly have known something about him and Heath was sure that he did not know. His mother had concealed much from him, but there was no conceivable reason why she should conceal the fact that he had had a brother.

And now, in the light of the information contained in this second letter of Pentlock's, this improbable surmise seemed even more of an impossibility. Pentlock had been making

inquiries—hang him! he would, of course—and it was agreed that the Condons had but one child, a baby. An "old lady" was certain that the baby was born in Brayton.

But why was the savings account not opened in Raymond's own name? And why, if Ella had opened it, had she never told Raymond anything about it? Possibly Condon had opened it for the son whom he supposed was his, and had never told her. Or, more likely, the amount of deposits in the beginning were small and Ella, who had never had the least idea of the value of money or of money matters, had never dreamed of such a thing as accrued interest. No doubt, if she remembered the account at all, she did not consider it worth the risk entailed by reminding Brayton—and, very likely, Brayton creditors—of her existence and whereabouts.

The account was opened in June, 1894. Raymond was a year old at that time. That was all right, that fitted with the facts, but the name in which it was opened did not fit with anything. Raymond had been called Raymond ever since he could remember, at least he had never hinted anything to the contrary. Once, when Heath questioned him, he had mentioned hearing his mother say that, when she was a little girl, she had had an Uncle Raymond, and had always fancied the name.

Except for the discrepancy in names, it was all simple enough. There was evidently a sum of money awaiting Raymond Condon in the Brayton Home Savings Bank and if he went to Brayton, with proofs of his identity, it would be paid him. If there had ever been a Ralph Condon, Junior, there was none now. If he and Raymond were not one and the same the latter was undoubtedly his only heir.

Yes, it sounded simple and, perhaps, to another and more callous soul than John Heath it would have been so. To him all the old objections were still in force. He had kept

his secret all these years. He could not bring himself to face the risk of having it broadcast to the world.

And yet the money was Raymond's. Not his, but Raymond's.

He locked the second Pentlock letter, together with the first, in the drawer of the antique secretary which Mrs. Seymour had so much admired, and put the key in his pocket. He lay awake the greater part of that night, making plans which amounted to nothing and got nowhere. All the next day in the shop, where there was almost no work to be done and therefore nothing to distract his attention, he thought and schemed and still reached no conclusion.

His sole visitor that afternoon was Lorenzo, and Lorenzo was no ray of sunshine for a gloomy day. He moped into the back shop and, without even a word of greeting, slumped heavily down upon an antique sofa, one of the "white elephants" in which Heath had invested the winter before.

Heath waited for him to speak, but, as he did not, began the conversation himself.

"Well, Lo," he observed, "how's your heart these days?"

Mr. Weeks came out of his doleful dumps with a start of surprise.

"My heart?" he repeated. "What's that mean? Ain't nothin' the matter with my heart, far's I know."

"Ain't wearin' out in the wash then? That's good."

"Wash? What kind of numb talk are you givin' me now? Look here, Hi Heath, I don't feel funny these days. If I want jokes I can hunt 'em up in the almanac."

"All right, hunt up a few for me. I can use 'em."

"Huh! . . . How's trade?"

"Don't know."

"Don't *know?*"

"Ain't well enough acquainted with it, just now, to ask."

Lorenzo slumped back on the sofa. He sighed. He regarded his former employer wistfully.

"Say, Hi," he asked, lowering his voice and glancing toward the shop door, "ain't got a spare pipe you'll lend me, have you?"

"Guess so. Where's yours?"

"Huldy hove it at the cat last week."

"At the cat?"

"Um-hm. 'Twas on the shelf in the woodshed. I'd ought to known better than to leave it there, but I never thought. The critter was up on the table lappin' out of the milk pitcher and she caught him at it. He dove out of the back door and she after him, heavin' things. She'd a—hove the cookstove if she could have lifted it. My pipe was the last thing she grabbed aholt of."

"I see. You could have picked it up, couldn't you?"

"No chance. She done that and chucked it into the fire. That's the third pipe of mine she's burnt up. She didn't know I had that one. I'd bought it unbeknownst to her, you see; had a few cents of my own, for a wonder."

"Well, you've got a home of your own, that's somethin'."

"My salvation's sins! You make me sick, Hi Heath! I wisht I was that cat."

"Why?"

"*He* ain't been home since. He's in luck."

He accepted the loan of a spare pipe, tobacco and matches and puffed for a few minutes. The operation seemed to comfort him slightly. When he next spoke it was to ask another question.

"Hi," he asked, "what would you do if you had to live in a meetin'house two-thirds of the time?"

"What would the meetin'house do? I guess that would be the main question."

"That's the way I'm livin' nowadays—if you can call it livin'. Them Pure in Hearters have reg'lar service in our front room two nights a week and on Sundays and there's a passel of 'em hangin' 'round, committeein' or sociablein' or

somethin', some of about every other day and night. I can't most generally find a chair to set down in—when I have a chance to set, which ain't often."

He smoked in gloomy silence till the pipe was empty. Then he rose and moved toward the door. There he turned.

"Hi," he said, "I read in the paper t'other day that a woman over to Wellmouth sued her husband for divorce 'count of his bein' cruel to her. She got it, too. I never knew you could get a divorce that easy, Hi."

Heath grinned. "Ain't figurin' on divorce, are you, Lo?"

Mr. Weeks did not reply. The article in the paper had evidently made a deep impression upon him.

"She swore right out in court," he went on, "that this husband of hers hove a teakettle at her. Um-hm, that's what she swore."

"That so? Well, did he hit the mark?"

"Don't know. Paper never said whether he did or not. . . . Hi," in a sudden burst of confidence, "Huldy hit me with the potater masher the other day."

"She did! Whew!"

"Um-hm. 'Twas that time with the cat I was just tellin' you about. She fired it at him and I was ten foot out of line, but 'twas me she hit."

"I see. Afraid you can't get a divorce for that, Lo. She wasn't aimin' at you."

"Huh! If she had been she'd most likely have landed the cat. Well, good-by. See you again some day or other, maybe—if I live that long."

That evening John Heath made a decision. He reached it after making and unmaking several others. One of those preliminary decisions was that he would write Mr. Fairweather, retired cashier of The Home Savings Bank, and ask him for the "particulars" concerning the Condons of Brayton which his successor had seemed confident the old gentleman could give. What satisfaction, if any, he might

derive from those particulars he could not imagine, but he determined to get them.

Something was wrong somewhere. He had no belief in premonition, he had no patience with superstition of any kind, but there it was—the uneasy fear, the dread of—something, he could not imagine what. It was the hated name of Ralph Condon, of course, which was responsible.

He had seated himself at the desk to write when another idea came to him. For some time he had contemplated going to Boston and interviewing the firm of wholesale fish dealers who, in the days when "boat fishing" was his means of livelihood, had bought his daily catch. Why not go to Boston now and see, not only the fish dealers, but Mr. Oscar Fairweather? Talking would be more satisfactory than writing.

He went, on the morning train, two days later, telling no one, not even Mrs. Harwell, of his destination. He left a note on the dining-room table saying that he should probably be away for "a couple of days," and that was all.

He reached the city just before noon and, after lunching in the station restaurant, set out for Commercial Street, where his former friends, the fish dealers, were located. He had walked but a little way, however, when he changed his mind. The fish business could wait, to-morrow would do well enough for that; he would get the Fairweather interview out of the way first.

The trolley took him to Brookline and a policeman directed him to Duncan Street. Number 1103 was a brick apartment house. The card of H. S. Somers was inserted in one of a series of nickel frames in the lobby. He pressed the button below it, the door clicked, he climbed two flights of stairs and a maid, peering through the crack of a partially opened door on the landing at the top of the second flight, asked him briskly what he wanted.

Mr. Fairweather? Well, she thought he was in, but she

was not true. She would ask Mrs. Somers. What name please?

John Heath gave his name. "You might tell Mr. Fairweather," he added, "that I've come to see him about some bank business. I won't bother him long."

The maid departed, taking care to shut the door after her, was gone a moment, then returned.

"You can come in," she said.

She showed him into a small living room, rather too crowded with furniture, and with a row of windows overlooking the street below. He sat in a chair and waited. Presently a dignified matron, architecturally constructed somewhat along the lines of Mrs. Hulda Weeks, entered and inspected him through her eyeglasses.

"You are Mr. Teeth?" she inquired, solemnly.

He smiled. "Why, not exactly, ma'am. Somethin' like it, though. I'm Mr. Heath."

The lady did not smile. A joke appeared to mean little in her life.

"Oh yes," she observed. "The maid must have caught the name incorrectly."

"Shouldn't wonder. Caught it on the fly, maybe. She was movin' fast."

This bit of facetiousness was received with the same stony stare. John Heath decided that there was no room for humor in that crowded apartment.

"You wished to speak with Mr. Fairweather?" she asked, coldly.

"Yes, ma'am."

"About what?"

"About somethin' connected with The Home Savings Bank at Brayton. He was cashier there for a good many years, I understand."

"I am Mrs. Somers, Mr. Fairweather's daughter. My father is not in the best of health and we—er—do not trouble

him with business matters unless it is absolutely necessary. Is your business important?"

"It is to me—yes, ma'am."

"Is it important to Mr. Fairweather?"

"'Fraid I can't tell that till I ask him."

Just how this dialogue would have ended, if it had gone on to an end, is problematical. Mrs. Somers was losing patience and John Heath was apparently anchored to the chair he sat in. An interruption came, however. An elderly man, thin, white-haired and spectacled, drifted into the room and peered absently at its occupants.

"Mary," he said, addressing the lady, "can you tell me where my shirt is?"

Mrs. Somers was startled out of her pose of ruffled majesty.

"Your shirt!" she exclaimed. "Father, what in the world—?"

The old gentleman nodded several times.

"My shirt with the black dots," he said, mournfully. "I can't find it anywhere. I am quite sure I wore it yesterday and now it has disappeared. I—I liked that shirt."

Heath saw his opportunity and grasped it. He rose from the chair and came forward.

"Mr. Fairweather, isn't it?" he asked. "My name is Heath. I live down at Nauticook. Came up here to Boston to-day on purpose to see you. How do you do?"

He extended his hand. Mr. Fairweather took it, peered through his spectacles, and then shook hands heartily.

"Why, yes, yes, yes!" he exclaimed, beaming. "How do you do? How do you do? Delighted to see you again, of course. You are looking very well."

Mrs. Somers gasped. "Why, father," she cried. "Do you know this—man?"

"Eh? Certainly, certainly. Know him very well. Er—

er—who did you say you were, Mr.—er—? the name escaped me."

"My name is Heath. I wanted to talk with you just a few minutes about an old account in The Home Savings Bank at Brayton. I've been given to understand that you know more about the ins and outs of that bank than anybody else on earth."

Mr. Fairweather's smile became almost beatific. "I do—I do," he agreed, "I spent almost fifty years of my life in that bank. Of course—of course! Delighted to help you in any way, Mr.—er— Oh, why *can't* I remember new names? I remember all the old ones perfectly."

His daughter put in a vigorous protest.

"Now, father," she snapped, "you know you are in no condition to be troubled by," with an indignant glare at the caller, "perfect strangers about that old bank. I told Mr. Heath that very thing."

"I am sorry to bother you, Mr. Fairweather," said Heath. "I am so. But there's a matter that's got to be settled and I shouldn't wonder if you could settle it, help settle it, any how."

"Yes, yes. Certainly, of course. No trouble at all. Anything connected with the bank is very dear to me. I know its history from the beginning. I am sure I can help you. Yes, yes. Yes, indeed."

"But, father, dear—"

"Now, now, Mary," fretfully, "please don't interfere. You know I had rather talk about the bank—my bank—than anything. I'm very glad you came to me, Mr.—er—er—yes, very glad. . . . Mary, please go away. Go and look for my shirt. I am quite anxious about that shirt."

Mrs. Somers gave it up. She marched to the door.

"The shirt," she observed, contentiously, "was probably sent to the wash this morning. . . . Mr. Heath, I *trust* you will not tire my father more than is necessary. Good afternoon."

She swept out of the room. Mr. Fairweather sat down in an armchair.

"Now—now—" he urged, with childlike eagerness, "we can talk about the bank, can't we? Yes, of course we can. What is it you wish to know about it, Mr.— Oh dear, your name has escaped me again."

Heath came to the point without waste of time. He told of his receipt of the Pentlock letters, spoke of the Condon account in The Home Savings Bank, mentioned the difference in names, and explained his reasons for calling on Mr. Fairweather.

"If the money they've got up there in Brayton belongs to my nephew," he said, "why of course he ought to have it. What I want to make sure—and what he would want, too, if he knew about it—is that it does belong to him. You were in charge of the bank when that account was opened and Mr. Pentlock seemed to calculate you'd probably remember who opened it and how. I'll be obliged if you'll tell me anything you do remember, Mr. Fairweather, a whole lot obliged."

Mr. Fairweather removed his spectacles, wiped them with his handkerchief and put both spectacles and handkerchief in his pocket.

"Yes, yes," he said, beaming. "Yes, yes, certainly, of course. Now let me see—let me see. What was the name you were inquiring about? Randall, was it?"

"No. Condon."

"Condon? Condon? Why, yes, there was a family of Condons in Brayton at one time. I remember them. Of course I do. There were four children."

"Four!"

"Yes, four. Three girls and a boy. Mr. Carroll, the father, was a conductor on the railroad. He—"

"Just a minute, Mr. Fairweather. It ain't the Carrolls I'm after—it's the Condons. I want to find out about Mr.

and Mrs. Ralph Condon, who were in Brayton along in 1893 to 1896, or thereabouts. The savin's account was opened, accordin' to the bank records, in June, 1894."

"1894? Why—why, yes. I remember now. There was such an account. I remember it perfectly. Mrs. Condon opened it in the name of her little son. I remember her, a very attractive woman. Her husband I don't seem to remember at all well. Was he—was he a traveling man?"

"That's right. Now you've got it."

"Yes," triumphantly. "I knew I should recollect if I set my mind to it. I have an exceptional memory, Mr.—er—er—"

"Sure. So Mr. Pentlock wrote. Now what do you remember about the Condons?"

"Let me see. They lived on West Street. They didn't own the house they lived in. It belonged to Mr. Francis James, one of our directors at that time. Mr. James was a very fine man. He married a Shepley; the Shepleys were another old Brayton family. Mr. Ebenezer Shepley was—"

"Sure he was. But about Mrs. Condon and that savin's account? You were goin' to say?"

Mr. Fairweather did not seem at all certain what he had been going to say. Prodded by frequent promptings on the part of Heath his "exceptional memory" resurrected certain items concerning the Condons, but none of great relevance to the subject in hand. He remembered that they—the Condons—lived in the town only a few years, and that Mr. James had some difficulty in renting the house on West Street after their departure.

"And I seem to remember," he mooned on, with exasperating deliberation, "that there was a baby born in that house while they occupied it. I am quite sure there was. . . . Why, yes," with a nod of satisfaction, "of course there must have been, otherwise Mrs. Condon would not have brought

a baby to the bank with her and opened an account in his name. That proves it, doesn't it!"

"Proves there was a baby. Well, I knew that much. But it doesn't explain why the account was opened in the name of Ralph Condon, Junior. The only Condon child I know about wasn't named Ralph."

"That's true, that's true. But there might have been two children, you know."

"Well, was there?"

"Dear me! Why, it seems as if there was but one. I think I should have known if there had been more than one. And I am quite sure that the child Mrs. Condon brought to the bank was very young indeed. . . . Why yes, *now* I remember. It begins to come back to me. The baby was in its carriage, asleep. I stepped out to look at it. The mother asked if I didn't think he was a pretty little thing. Of course I said I did, but I remember thinking that all very tiny babies looked much alike. Like little—er—red vegetables, so to speak."

He chuckled and rubbed his knees. John Heath frowned.

"And this was in June, 1894?"

"That was the date on the bank books, wasn't it? Yes; then it was the correct one. I never make mistakes, Mr. Condon."

"My name's Heath, but it doesn't make any difference. There was a mistake in that 'Ralph' name, though. There must have been. That's all you can remember about it, Mr. Fairweather?"

"Yes, I am sorry to say it is. If I were in Brayton I might be able to— Why, bless me!" with a sudden straightening in the chair, "my diary! I had forgotten my diary. That might help us, Mr.—er—sir."

"Diary?"

"Why yes, all my life, ever since I was seventeen years old, I have kept a diary. A very full and complete record of

daily happenings. It is quite possible that there may be some entry in my diary of that year which would refer to the opening of that account, or at least to the Condon family."

"Hmph! But all your old diaries would be up in Brayton, wouldn't they?"

"No, indeed!" with a triumphant pat of the knee. "They are all here. All of my personal possessions are here. I have left Brayton for good. . . . I shall never go back there again. The Home Savings Bank, my bank, was my pride, sir. To see it in the hands of—of—however, we will not go into that. It is a painful subject to me."

"Do you suppose you could locate your diary for 1894? If you could, and it wouldn't be too much trouble—"

"No trouble at all. I know precisely where it is, where all my diaries and private papers are. I frequently refer to them. If you will excuse me, Mr. Condon, I will get this one this very minute."

He rose and hastened from the room. Heath called after him.

"1894 is the year," he called.

He rather expected the old gentleman to return, if he remembered to return at all, with a diary for 1904, or 1874, or something of the sort, but he was pleasantly disappointed. Mr. Fairweather's return was prefaced with a few words in the corridor, where, apparently, his daughter was remonstrating with him for wasting his time and tiring himself all out with "that man," but, when he toddled in again, a leather-covered book in his hand and, upon its cover, in gilt letters were the figures "1894."

He sat down again in the armchair and, after an agitated search for his spectacles, which Heath reminded him were in his pocket, he opened the diary.

"Now then," he exclaimed. "Here we are. The date was—?"

"Sometime in June."

"June—June—June. . . . June—er—first—yes. Nothing there. . . . Second—third— Nothing there concerning the Condons. . . . Hm! . . . Ah! . . . Listen to this, Mr. Condon:

"June 5. . . . Had a pleasant visit at the bank this morning from Mrs. Ralph Condon. She and her husband, who is a traveling salesman for a Rochester firm, are newcomers to Brayton. They are living in one of the James cottages on West Street. Have lived there for a year and a half, so Mrs. Condon told me. She came to the bank to open a savings account in the name of her little son, Ralph, Junior, born only a month ago, she says. She is a very good-looking woman and very proud of her new baby. Insisted upon my seeing him, asleep in his carriage. The account was opened with a deposit of thirty-five dollars. I congratulated her, of course, upon making this provision for little Ralph. Thrift is a valuable quality and many young mothers are neglectful of it. I told her that I hoped to see her frequently in the bank and trusted that the account would grow rapidly. Elwood Gaines was in during the afternoon and withdrew one hundred dollars from his account. I was sorry to see this, because—

"Hmm, hmm. . . . Well, that seems to be all concerning the Condons; but it is something—oh yes, it is something. At least it confirms my recollections, doesn't it? I have a splendid memory, always had, Mr. Condon."

John Heath left the apartment shortly afterward. There were, so far as Fairweather was able to find, no other entries referring to the Condons or the Condon account. The old man, his "exceptional memory" spurred by the diary, remembered that other deposits were made during the next year or two and thought he remembered that Mrs. Condon had left Brayton leaving no address, in 1895 or 1896. At all events, he remembered the account had been inactive for a long time.

"I tried to trace these people," he declared. "At least I

take it for granted that I did, it was a part of my duty as cashier. But, even though I was unable to do so, that money, with its growing interest, was absolutely safe while it was in my charge. What it may be now, I—well, I do not care to speak further on that subject."

Heath stood on the sidewalk below the apartment for some minutes. What he had learned had not helped to dissipate the uneasiness in his mind. On the contrary, it had strengthened it. The old vague suspicions were still there and with them new ones. One new one in particular which, if it were true—

Good God! if it *were* true!

He walked, in a daze, scarcely conscious that he was walking at all, to the corner of the street where the trolleys ran. One passed and he did not hail it. Leaning against the building on the corner, he took out his pocketbook and counted the money it contained. Yes, there was enough. Barely enough, perhaps, but enough he was sure.

That evening, at seven o'clock, he took the train for Brayton, New York.

CHAPTER XIV

BRAYTON was awake, and breakfasting, when Heath arrived there next morning. Heavy-eyed and haggard —he had slept scarcely at all during the night on the train— he alighted and, carrying his bag, entered the station. He ate a roll and drank a cup of coffee at the station lunch counter, checked his bag at the parcel room, and went out to walk up and down the streets. The bank would not open until nine o'clock and it was not yet eight.

Brayton was a bigger town than he had expected, a young city. There were street cars and business blocks, a pretentious city hall, and, rising in the outskirts, the roofs and chimneys of several large factories. The Home Savings Bank occupied a building of its own facing the central square, a building which was obviously quite new. It was evident that Brayton had grown rapidly during recent years and that the savings bank had grown with it.

He bought a newspaper, the *Brayton Daily Times,* and, returning to the waiting room of the railway station, tried to read it as a means of passing the time. The news was sensational enough. The German armies were attacking along a wide front and the Allies were falling back. There were more sinkings by submarines and another American ship was one of the victims. Congress was much excited and the President was severely criticized and as stoutly defended.

John Heath scanned the headlines and tried to read one of the leading news articles, but he could not concentrate. Wars and rumors of wars did not interest him now. All night long his mind had been busy, going over and over the interview with Fairweather, comparing dates, asking himself

questions and trying to answer them. Every answer save one had a flaw in it, and that one he would not accept. It could not be the true one—it must not be. If it were, the whole foundation upon which his interest in life had been builded, which had made that life worth while for the past fifteen years, had crumbled.

No, no, no! It was not true. There was an explanation somewhere and he meant to find it. It was the determination to find it, to prove it, which had brought him to Brayton.

He forced himself to remain in the waiting room until five minutes to nine. At nine precisely he entered the brick and marble portal of The Home Savings Bank. Somewhat to his surprise he learned that the cashier had already arrived and was in his private room looking over the morning mail. He gave his name to the bank porter. Yes, Mr. Pentlock would see him. Would he come this way.

Franklin G. Pentlock in the flesh was very much like the Pentlock of the letters. A brisk, perky little man, prematurely bald, wearing shell eyeglasses attached to his person by a black silk ribbon. He was much surprised to see Mr. Heath, but happy to do so. Oh, certainly he remembered the letters. So Mr. Heath had come all the way from Massachusetts to look into the matter of the Condon account? Well, well! a long trip.

John Heath agreed that it was a long trip, but added that, as he had some other business along the way—he did not say where—he had thought he might as well keep on to Brayton and straighten the thing out, if possible. He was reticent and told practically nothing of his own or Raymond's story, beyond admitting that he had known Ella Condon in the years before she came to Brayton and that he had some knowledge of her son.

"But the boy's name isn't Ralph, Mr. Pentlock," he said. "Now what I've come here for is to have you tell me what

you know about that account, exactly when 'twas opened and how much it amounts to now. Will you tell me that?"

"Certainly. I take it, then, that you haven't communicated with Mr. Fairweather, as I suggested?"

"Um-hm, I have. He told me some things, but nothin' explainin' the difference in names. That is the sticker—yet."

"I see. Well, that is peculiar, of course. The account upon our books is in the name of Ralph Condon, Junior. It may have been a mistake, however. It seems odd, that sort of mistake, and if it had occurred under my management I should be a good deal disturbed about it. In the old days, and under the—excuse me—rather loose methods which prevailed here for so long, mistakes were made. This is not the only one, Mr. Heath. Far be it from me to criticize as well-intentioned a person as Mr. Fairweather, but—well, you understand."

Heath did not trouble to say whether he understood or not.

"Could you get those dates and figures for me, Mr. Pentlock?" he asked.

The cashier rang a bell, gave an order to a messenger, and, a minute or two later, an elderly, dried-up individual, whose name, it appeared, was Toole, made his entrance.

"Mr. Toole is our head bookkeeper," announced Pentlock. "He has been with us for—how long, Toole?"

"Thirty-two years," chirped Mr. Toole, proudly.

"Yes. Toole, Mr. Heath here is inquiring about that matter of the Condon account. Will you bring us the data on that?"

Toole brought the data forthwith. The account was opened June 5, 1894, the name was Ralph Condon, Junior —no middle initial—and, with accrued interest, it now amounted to three hundred dollars and forty-three cents.

"As I said, an appreciable sum of money," was Pentlock's

comment. "Now, Mr. Heath, I appreciate your scruples—or is it young Condon's scruples—?"

"He don't know anything about it yet."

"I see. As I say, I appreciate your scruples in not making a more definite claim for this money, but it seems to me that the difficulty isn't very great. If there ever was a Ralph Condon, Junior, there doesn't seem to be one now, and if this young—er—what did you say his name was?"

"Didn't say."

"Oh! . . . Hm. Well, whatever his name is if he can prove that he is the son of Ralph and Ella Condon, I think the bank will be willing to take a chance and pay him. We are very anxious to get rid of these old, dead accounts."

"Um-hm. Mr. Toole, did you ever happen to know anything about the Condons when they lived here?"

"Yes, sir."

"What! You did?"

"Yes, Mr. Heath, I knew them slightly. My wife knew them better than I did. She has been dead thirteen years last October."

Pentlock stiffened. His small eyes snapped behind the shell glasses.

"Well!" he cried angrily. "This is news to me, Toole. Why haven't you said anything of the kind before?"

Poor old Toole cringed. He rubbed his thin hands and squeaked explanations. He had not known anything about the opening of the savings account, other than the fact that it was opened. Mr. Fairweather attended to that personally; he himself was only assistant bookkeeper then. He had been acquainted with the Condons when they lived in Brayton, because they occupied one of the James cottages on West Street and he and his wife occupied another.

"I didn't know Mr. Condon hardly at all, very few folks did," he stammered, anxiously. "He was a traveling salesman, I—I believe, and away a whole lot. I remember

Claribel—she was my wife, Mr. Heath—I remember her saying that—along towards the last of the Condons being here, that was—she didn't believe Mr. and Mrs. Condon got on very well together, because Mrs. Condon didn't hardly ever mention his name any more. That may have been just woman's notions, though."

Pentlock would have asked another question, but Heath cut in ahead of him.

"Remember when they came here to live?" he asked.

"Why, yes, I guess I do. Let me see. We took that James cottage in 1892—November it was—and they didn't take theirs until over a year later. It was vacant for quite a time before that and Mr. James—our landlord—was a good deal fretted about it. He hated to lose a dollar, Mr. James did."

"Over a year later, eh? That would be early in 1894."

"Yes, sir. Just about January, I should say."

"Hmph! . . . January, 1894." Then, quickly, "Sure it wasn't 1893?"

"Oh yes! I was made head bookkeeper on January 1, '94, and my salary was raised. That meant a good deal to us in those days. Claribel and I had a little New Year's dinner—asked some friends in, you know—to celebrate the good news, so to say."

"Never mind your dinners, Toole," ordered Pentlock, with lofty disapproval. "Stick to the subject."

"Yes, Mr. Pentlock," humbly. "Yes, of course."

"Did the Condon folks come to your dinner?" asked Heath.

"No. That is one reason why I am sure they did not take the James house till after that. We had most of the neighbors in and, if they had been living there then, we would have had them, too. Seems as if we would, don't you think?"

"And they hadn't been livin' anywheres else in Brayton before that?"

"No-o; no, sir, I am quite sure they hadn't. Claribel come to know Mrs. Condon pretty well and seems to me

I remember her saying that she told her they had moved to Brayton from some other town. I don't think Claribel ever told me where it was, even if Mrs. Condon told her. . . . Oh yes! now I do remember she said she guessed they hadn't been married or keeping house very long, because all their things, furniture and such, were brand-new. My wife got quite interested in them," with an apologetic smile, "on account of the baby. We never had any children of our own, Mr. Heath, and—well, you know how women are."

"For heaven's sake, Toole—" began the cashier, but Heath interrupted.

"So the Condons had a baby, eh?" he asked, eagerly. "About how old would you say it was? How old was their baby when they moved into this house nigh where you lived?"

Mr. Toole smiled feebly, glanced at the cashier's face and the scowl upon it, and ceased smiling immediately.

"Oh—oh, there wasn't any baby when they first came," he stammered. "Oh no! The baby was born later, some time that spring."

John Heath caught his breath. There was an appreciable interval before he spoke again.

"You are dead sure about that?" he demanded, slowly. "Sure they didn't have any other child before this one?"

"Why—why, yes. Of course they may have had one Claribel and I didn't know anything about, one that died, or something like that. They were alone, just he and his wife, when we first knew them; I am almost sure of that."

"Why? . . . Wait a minute, Mr. Pentlock; I am interested in this part. . . . Why are you sure, Mr. Toole?"

"Oh, because—" Toole was nervously anxious, "because —well, you see, Mr. Heath, Claribel knew this—er—this baby was expected and she was real excited about it. You know how it is with women folks. Anything to do with babies, having them, and—er—er so on, always seems to interest them more than it does us men."

Heath leaned back in his chair. He was silent, his brows drawn together, and his hands thrust into his coat pockets. His sunburned face had paled slightly. Mr. Franklin G. Pentlock was impatient.

"Well," he observed, testily, "I must say, Toole, that I cannot understand why you have never mentioned any of this before. You knew I was anxious to get rid of those dead accounts and that this Condon account was one of the largest."

Poor Toole was abject and frightened. He stammered more apologies. Of course he knew about the Condon account, but he supposed the cashier knew more about it than he did. Mr. Pentlock had never said he wanted to know about the Condon family, or—or anything like that. He was dreadfully sorry. He—

Pentlock broke in. "That will do," he snapped. "I consider you very much at fault. I shall not forget this matter; you will hear from me again. You may go now."

John Heath looked up. "Wait a second, Mr. Toole," he ordered. "Who took care of—of the Condon woman while she was havin' her baby? Had a nurse, didn't they?"

"Oh, yes! That is, I suppose they did. Probably it was old Mrs. Graham; she did a great deal of that sort of nursing in our neighborhood. Yes, I—I seem to remember that she was the one."

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know. . . . Yes, I mean I do. She is dead. She died several years ago."

"How about the doctor? Who was he? Do you know that?"

"Oh, yes. It was Dr. Bartlett. He was our doctor, too. A very fine man— Excuse me, Mr. Pentlock, I know you're not interested in that."

"*I* am." It was Heath who spoke. "Is this—what's-his-name—Dr. Bartlett—alive?"

"Yes, sir. Yes, Mr. Heath. But he is not practicing. He has retired."

"Live here in Brayton, does he?"

The cashier's impatience was growing. All this wealth of detail concerning a question of identity which he considered settled, and which was keeping him from other and really important matters, was irritating.

"I can tell you that, Mr. Heath," he said, rather sharply. "Dr. Bartlett lives in the north end of the city. I can give you his address, if it is actually necessary."

"Wish you would."

"All right. Look it up, Toole."

Mr. Toole departed perspiring, and shaky at the knees. Pentlock snorted in disgust.

"There is another relic of the past that I shall have to get rid of," he declared. "Sympathy and charity are well enough in their place, but that place is not in an up-to-date institution like this one. Well, Mr. Heath, I should say we had pretty well cleared up the difficulty. There seems to be little doubt that the Condons had only one son in 1894, when the account was opened. If you know—as you seem to think you do—where that son is, and he can be satisfactorily identified, that should be all that is necessary."

Heath sighed. "His name isn't Ralph," he muttered. "At least, I—I—"

"Yes? What?"

"Nothin'."

"The name is doubtless just another Fairweather blunder. There have been enough of them, the Lord knows. I—Hmph! Well, Toole, were you able to get that address, or was even that too much for your capabilities?"

The bookkeeper was out of breath.

"I've got it. I've got it, Mr. Pentlock," he gasped. "It was in the telephone book. Here it is, sir."

"I don't want it. Give it to Mr. Heath."

Heath took the slip of paper from Toole's trembling hand, glanced at it, and put it in his pocket. He rose, stood for a moment, gazing through the windows at the busy street without, then turned to the door.

"Well, good-by, Mr. Pentlock," he said. "Much obliged."

"Welcome, quite welcome, Mr. Heath. We shall see you, or young Mr. Condon, soon, I presume?"

"Eh? . . . Oh sure, I guess so. . . . Good-by."

"As quickly as you can, please. What are you waiting for, Toole? Haven't you any work to do?"

John Heath came slowly down the marble steps of The Home Savings Bank. He took from his pocket the slip of paper which the bookkeeper had given him. Dully he looked at the address penciled upon it. Dr. Bartlett lived at 110 Schuyler Street.

He walked to the curb. An ancient automobile was standing there, with a pasteboard card, lettered "Taxi," attached to its radiator cap. The driver, also an ancient, climbed from the seat. Heath handed him the paper.

"There's where I'm goin'," he said.

It was a ride of perhaps fifteen minutes. Schuyler Street was a pleasant residential byway and number 110 was a pleasant, homelike house fronting upon a small yard. Two large elms—their upper branches bare of leaves, swaying in the chill November breeze—stood one at each side of the front door.

Dr. Bartlett himself answered the bell. He was white-haired, bearded and spectacled. Heath gave his name and explained briefly that he had come to ask some questions about a family who had lived in Brayton at one time.

"Patients of yours, I believe they was, Doctor," he added.

Dr. Bartlett ushered him into a small reception room and pulled forward a chair, taking another himself.

"Glad to help you if I can, Mr. Heath," he said. "Who were these people you are asking about?"

Heath told him. "They had a baby while they was here, along in the early nineties 'twas, and the folks at the savin's bank said they calculated you was their doctor at the time. Remember 'em, do you?"

Bartlett nodded. "Yes indeed, remember them very well. Mrs. Condon was an attractive woman. Very good-looking. Perhaps that helps me to remember her," with a good-natured chuckle.

Heath did not join in the chuckle.

"It was this baby I'm specially interested in," he said. "Can you give me just the date when it was born?"

"Yes. The record of the case will be on my books. Glad to look it up for you. Do you happen to know the year? I am not sure of it, myself."

"In 1893—or '94. Along about the fifth of May, or so I'm told."

"I see. Make yourself comfortable, Mr. Heath. I'll be back in a few minutes. My case records of that period are upstairs in my study, but I can get them without trouble."

His few minutes were more than twenty, but John Heath was not aware of it. Time did not mean anything to him just then. The premonition of impending evil, which had come to him with Pentlock's first letter, which he could not shake off, and which had sent him to Fairweather, to Pentlock, and now to this man, had ceased to be a premonition, it had become a certainty. He knew. He was perfectly sure what Bartlett would find in his records, knew it as well as if he had already seen it.

The doctor hurried in. "Sorry to keep you waiting this way, Mr. Heath," he said. "A married man may think he knows exactly where his belongings are, but he is usually mistaken. By asking his wife in the beginning he can usually save time. Here is the record of the Condon family. Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Condon. Lives on West Street—yes.

Son born May 5, 1894. No very unusual features about the case. I—"

"Just a minute. You're sure 'twas 1894, not '93?"

"Yes. May 5, 1894. . . . Why, what's the matter, Mr. Heath? Are you— What is it?"

He stepped forward, but John Heath lifted a hand.

"All right—all right," he protested, gruffly. "No, no, nothin's the matter with me. . . . Doctor, can you tell me this? Was this baby the first one she—this Condon woman had ever had?"

Bartlett scanned his notes. "Yes," he said.

"You're sure? That's—that's pretty important."

"Yes. I believe I said there were no unusual features about the case. There were not, in a way. Perfectly normal birth. I see that I have written here: 'First child, therefore some worrisome moments, but no complications. Boy perfect in every way. Nurse Graham.' That answers your question, doesn't it, Mr. Heath?"

Heath made no reply. He dropped his hands heavily upon the arms of his chair and lifted himself from it. He kept his face turned from the physician, who was regarding him anxiously.

"Um-hm," he muttered. "Yes—well, that's that. . . . Doctor, up our way—I live in a small place, of course—it's the usual thing, I believe, to have some sort of entry made with the town clerk when a child's born. Have anything like that here?"

"Certainly. You'll find the birth recorded in the proper department at our city hall. Very little trouble to look it up, if you wish to do so."

A half hour later John Heath, leaning over a pile of records in the Brayton City Hall, read the following:

"Ralph Raymond Condon. Born May 5, 1894. Parents, Ralph and Ella Condon. Residence 52 West Street. James P. Bartlett, attending physician."

CHAPTER XV

THE train for Boston left Brayton at eight-thirty that evening. John Heath was on board when it left. He did not occupy a berth in the sleeping car, but a seat in one of the coaches. Sprawled in the corner by the window, his head upon the plush cushion, he sat there all night, his eyes closed, but sleeping not at all. He paid no heed to the stops at stations and, during the long wait at Albany, when the majority of the passengers got out and others took their places, he did not move.

Well, it was settled now. Everything was explained, was perfectly clear. And what a simple explanation it was. When the characters of the individuals intimately concerned were considered it was precisely what should have been expected. A shrewd, hard, calculating, worldly woman, utterly selfish, caring for no one on earth save herself and her child, and, when she realized she was dying, coolly planning for the future of that child.

Clever—yes, but she was always clever. She knew him, John Heath. She knew him to be what he was, what he had always been, soft-hearted, soft-headed, trustful, believing—the ideal innocent. *She* knew he would rise to the bait she had provided. He would swallow the whole mean, miserable lie without once discovering it was a lie. Any one but he would have investigated, have checked up on dates, on past history—any one with a thimbleful of common sense. She knew he would not do that. Oh, she did know him through and through! She had bet, with her last breath, on that knowledge—and had won.

But no—she must have had the plan in her mind a long

time before that. It was too carefully evolved. She must have begun to consider it before she came to Coleville, before she left Brayton to go—wherever she and the boy had gone and lived for the year or two after leaving the New York town. She must, because she had told Raymond that he was born in May, 1893, and he, when he came to Nauticook, supposed himself to be eleven years old. She must have been evolving the scheme, probably as a lifesaver in case of need, away back in that last Brayton year; probably soon after she and Condon quarreled and separated. Toole had reported his wife's surmises that the Condons did not get on well together. Her paramour had left her, she had a child, and even then, she was scheming, to establish that child's legitimacy and provide him with a parent and guardian if it became necessary to do so.

She had run away from Fox Harbor in the fall of 1892. She had told every one—except Brayton people, of course—that Raymond was born in May, 1893. He was not born until May of the following year; Raymond, himself, did not know this, but it was true, and, being true, he was not John Heath's legitimate son, but Ralph Condon's bastard.

This was the horror that was shaking John Heath's soul. His son—the boy he had come to love, to worship, to idolize, that he had worked for and sacrificed for all these years, whose career and success had come to mean everything worth while in life to him, who was all there was in life, was not his son. He was the illegitimate brat of that other man and this scheming, lying Jezebel.

He thought of his cherished dream of some day telling Raymond that he, John Heath, was not his "Uncle John," but his own father. That was to be a wonderful hour, when that secret was disclosed. Oh, good Lord, what a joke! He laughed aloud, a laugh that ended in a groan. The joke was on him once more, just as it usually was. He was the prize joke of creation.

Well, the joke had not lasted to the end. Thanks to one little unreckoned item in that woman's arithmetic, the forgotten or neglected savings account in the Brayton bank, the time for the laugh had come sooner than she expected. If it had not been for Pentlock and his "modern methods" he would never have known. He would have gone on believing the lie, have gone on dreaming and doting, living in a fool's paradise, till he died.

Damn her, she *was* clever! The boy had been christened Ralph Condon. The Raymond was just a middle name, probably neither she nor Condon ever called the child by it. The bank account was opened in the name of Ralph Condon, Junior, and he *was* Ralph Condon, Junior. Then, when she and Condon fought and parted, she dropped the Ralph and began using the Raymond. All part of the careful scheme, of course. "Ralph" would not do; John Heath might not be as favorably inclined toward the bearer of that name. Oh, she had him appraised and estimated, she had his number. She knew him to be a fool, and a fool doesn't grow out of his folly—the absolute fool, such as he was.

The train was over an hour late in reaching Boston. John Heath dragged his cramped limbs from the seat and stepped out upon the platform of the South Station. The morning train for Nauticook had gone. There would not be another until four-thirty that afternoon. He had the better part of a day to fill in somehow.

He thought of the fish dealers on Commercial Street, but he dismissed the thought as soon as it came to him. Business did not interest him now. Nothing interested him, not even breakfast, and he had not eaten a mouthful since the previous morning. He wandered about the streets, looking into the shop windows and seeing nothing except occasional reflections of his own face mirrored in the glass, and he hated that. He hated his dead wife and Condon—yes, and the boy she had used as the bait for her trap. Most of all

he hated himself for walking into that trap. How he had boasted and gloated over that boy. He writhed as he remembered some of his complacent boastings. There should be no more. And no more of the boy, so far as he was concerned.

There were barrooms on almost every corner in those days, particularly in the section of the city where he was wandering. They began to tempt him. He had not taken a drink since he came to Nauticook; not that he was a fanatical teetotaler, but because he distrusted his own ability to drink in moderation. Later, too, because of Raymond; he must set a good example for Raymond.

Now the sight of the gay array of bottles in the windows attracted him. There was forgetfulness behind those windows. A man could get away from his troubles, for a time at least, if he went in there. He had done it often enough, in the days of his shore leaves from the mackerel schooner. He remembered that the first drink did not help much, but the second and third and fourth used to do it.

More than once he set his hand to the latch of one of those places. Once he went as far as the pair of swinging doors just inside. Each time he turned back. No, be hanged if he would! He did not want to forget, he wanted to remember. He was going back to Nauticook, to his own home, where he could plan and think. He could not do that if he were drunk.

The evening train was due in Nauticook just before eight. As it was November, not July or August, it was but a few minutes behind time. There was the usual group awaiting its arrival. John Heath alighted from the rear platform of the last car and strode quickly across the lighted area. He did not wish to be recognized or hailed.

"Hi! Hi Heath! Hold on a minute! Wait!"

Heath neither "held on" nor waited. He recognized the voice, but he pretended not to hear it. He could not escape,

however. Lorenzo Weeks was running after him, shouting his name.

He stopped and turned. "For heaven's sakes, shut up!" he ordered angrily.

Lorenzo came panting alongside.

"Well, for salvation's sakes, Hi," he demanded breathlessly, "what's your hurry? I see you the minute you got off them cars. Been hollerin' ever since, I have. Didn't you hear me?"

"Whole town heard you, I guess likely."

"But—but, Hi, what's your hurry? Wait, can't you? I've got somethin' to tell you."

Heath was striding on again. Lorenzo trotted at his heels, making frantic efforts to catch his arm.

"Aw, Hi," he panted, "don't gallop so. Heave to a minute. Don't you understand? I say I've got somethin' to tell you."

"All right, tell it."

"How—how in time can I tell anything with you half a mile ahead of me like this? . . . Aw, Hi!"

He was shouting again. Heath swung about.

"If you keep screechin' my name I'll—I'll choke you," he growled. "Now what is it? Say it quick."

"I—I—well, my mercy, you're ugly enough, I must say. Boston vittles don't relish with you, I guess. I've been waitin' up to the depot for half an hour, hopin' you might be on this train, and—and now look at the way you talk to me."

"How did you know I'd been to Boston?"

"Knew you'd gone somewheres, didn't I? Your shop was locked up and Seven-up was shut up, and you wa'n't nowheres around town, leastways nobody'd laid eyes on you for two days, so I wouldn't cal'late you was to home, I shouldn't say. And when he came huntin' me up and tryin' to locate you, I says to him, says I, 'If he's gone away from Nauticook, he's either gone in Snow's automobile or on the

train.' Well, Seth he said you'd hadn't took his car, so the next thing him and me done was to come right up to the depot. And there he told us you'd bought a ticket to Boston, so I says I to him, I says—"

"Sshh! What's all this he-in' and I-in'? Who told you I'd gone to Boston—Seth Snow?"

"No, course not. Seth didn't know where you'd gone; how would he? The station agent told us, of course."

"Told who?"

"Why, me and Raymond."

"Raymond!"

"Yes, sir. Ah ha! Surprised you some, haven't I? Thought likely I would if you give me half a chance."

"Raymond! . . . Is he here, in Nauticook?"

"Um-hm, that's just where he is. Come on yesterday noon train, he did. And when he found you wasn't to the shop, nor to home neither, the next thing he done was to chase down to our house alookin' for me and askin' me where you was. I couldn't tell him, and Huldy she couldn't, so—"

"Hush up! What is Raymond doin' down here?"

"Why, he came apurpose to see you."

"What does he want to see me for?"

Mr. Weeks sighed. "We-ll," he admitted regretfully, "I don't know. I tried to find out and so did Huldy, but he didn't seem to cal'late he wanted to tell. All he'd say was that 'twas mighty important. He acted as if 'twas, too. All kind of twittered and nervous he was. Huldy, she can't make out what—"

"Where is he now?"

"To the Wayfarers' Rest; anyway that's where I suppose he is. When he found Seven-up all shut and nobody home, he went to the hotel. He was around again this mornin' askin' if we'd heard anything from you. He said he couldn't stay but a couple of days afore he went back to New York, but he'd just got to see you afore he went. He was more

fussed-up and nervous to-day than he was yesterday, seemed so. Huldy says— Why, hold on, Hi. Soul's sins! Where you gallopin' to now?"

Heath did not reply. Lorenzo caught up with him.

"I know where Raymond's room is, Hi," he said, eagerly. "Want me should take you there? Just as soon as not."

"No."

"You don't? Ain't you goin' there right off?"

"No."

"You ain't? Well, I vow! Want me should go tell him you're to home and for him to come right down?"

"No. Clear out and mind your own business."

He strode away into the darkness. Lorenzo, utterly taken aback, stood staring after him.

It was a black night, chill and raw, with a few drops of rain beginning to fall and prospects of more to follow. The wind, blowing from the northeast, was whining mournfully through the pines by the side of the depot road. If John Heath's mind had been in its normal condition he would have prophesied a storm before morning.

As it was he paid no heed to either wind or rain. His bag swinging at the end of his right arm, he tramped on. Just before reaching the main road he swung over a fence and set out by the path, the short cut across the open fields toward the bay. Over the little rise, a few hundred yards to his right, the lighted windows of the Wayfarers' Rest gleamed. He glanced at them.

Raymond was there. Behind one of those windows the young man was sitting, probably thinking about him. Only three days before and the knowledge that he was there, in Nauticook, would have sent John Heath running in that direction, eager to look at him, to shake his hand, to welcome him. Now, after that one glance, he did not look again. He did not wish to see him, nor speak with him. To think about him—yes, that he must do and intended to do; but

until he had thought his way clear, until he had reached some sort of decision as to what his own line of action in the future might be, Raymond was the last person he wished to meet.

Ralph Raymond Condon! Ralph Condon, Junior! To the devil with him!

The path led through the outskirts of another pine grove and over another little hill. As he reached its crest the roof of Seven-up loomed blackly against the black sky. He entered by the rear door, through the kitchen and dining room. As he crossed the threshold of the latter, he noticed that, through the crack of the door of the living room, a light was shining.

He flung open the door. There was a lamp burning upon the center table and, rising from a chair beside it, was Raymond himself.

They faced each other.

CHAPTER XVI

RAYMOND was the first to speak. He had not heard Heath enter the house and, at the sound of the opening door, had sprung to his feet and turned. His face was pale, but now, as he recognized his uncle, the color came back with a rush. His eyes brightened.

"Why—why, Uncle John!" he shouted. "Oh, by George," with a shake in his voice which expressed surprise and, obviously, tremendous relief, "I'm glad to see you!"

He stepped forward, his hand outstretched. Heath did not take the hand, nor did he move from where he stood.

"Hello," he said, gruffly.

The young man stopped in his stride. The smile faded from his face.

"Why, Uncle John!" he gasped. "Why, what is it? What's wrong?"

"What are you doin' down here?"

"I came to see you. You are surprised, of course; I don't wonder."

"Ain't surprised—now. I knew you was in Nauticook."

"You did? How?"

"Lo Weeks just told me."

"Oh! Oh yes, I see. Yes, Lo knew. He and Mrs. Harwell were the first persons I went to see after I got here yesterday and found the shop and the house both closed. Oh, by George, Uncle John, if you could realize how I felt when they told me you had gone away, they didn't know just where, nor when you would be back! I was next door to crazy. I just *had* to see you. I was going to wait until tomorrow and then, if you didn't come—"

He drew a hand across his forehead. "Well," with a sigh and a shake of the head, "you're here now, thank the Lord. Where have you been?"

"Boston—part of the time."

"Boston?" vaguely. "Antiques again?"

"No."

The curt answers, the tone and, more than all, the expression upon John Heath's face, were having their effect. Raymond's first impression, that something was wrong, was becoming a conviction. He was puzzled, daunted. Never before, since first leaving the cottage to go away to college, had he returned to it to meet a welcome like this. Nor, in all the years of their association, had his uncle looked at him as he was looking now. Not a smile, not a twinkle in the eye, merely grimly set lips and a heavy, frowning stare.

He could not understand it. The only explanation which came to his mind was an alarming one.

"Uncle John," he cried, with sudden sharpness, "you haven't heard already, have you? They—they haven't found it out?"

"Found out what?"

"You haven't heard anything about—about me? They haven't written—or telegraphed?"

"Nobody's written or telegraphed anything. What is all this, anyway?"

"You're sure—I mean—you *haven't* heard?"

"Heard nothin'. What would I be likely to hear?"

Raymond did not answer. There was still suspicion and, or so it seemed, dread and alarm in his gaze. Heath repeated his question. "What is it I'd be apt to hear?" he demanded.

"Oh—oh, nothing, of course. But you act so—so different. Aren't you glad to see me?"

And now Heath did not reply. He took off his overcoat, tossed his hat into a corner and, coming forward, sat down

in a chair by the table. He regarded the puzzled, troubled young face turned toward his, studied it appraisingly. The image of his mother—yes, he had always been that and John Heath had long since ceased to resent the likeness. In fact, as the old bitterness wore away, he had found pleasure in it. Now it was hateful to him. His fancy began to search for, and find, traces of another resemblance. The shape of the head, the lift of the chin—Condon's chin had lifted like that when he spoke. Of course, of course. And he had been such a blind jackass that he had never noticed it until now.

He motioned toward a chair. "Sit down," he commanded curtly. "Well, you came here to see me, you say. How could you get away to come? Thought you was supposed to be on your job in New York?"

"I am. I was. I—I—"

"Hazen hasn't fired you, has he?"

"What! . . . Why—why, of course he hasn't. What made you think anything like that? I asked for a day or two off to come and see you and they gave it to me."

"Did, eh? Hmph! What did you tell 'em you was comin' to see me about? What did you come for?"

"I—" Raymond hesitated; his cheeks flushed and then paled. Heath, still regarding him with gloomy intentness, noticed that he was thinner than when they had last met. He was haggard—and very nervous. As he fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette and lighted it, his hands were shaking.

"I had to come, Uncle John," he blurted. "I just had to. You told me to, you know."

"What do you mean—I told you?"

"Why, you know you have always said—said it over and over—that if I ever got into trouble, any kind of trouble, I must come straight to you and you would help me out. I knew you meant it. I knew you would help me, so I came."

The cigarette fell to the floor. He stooped, picked it up,

dropped it and picked it up again. Heath said nothing. Raymond looked at him, waited, and then, receiving no encouragement, stammered hurriedly on.

"You are the only one who can help me, Uncle John. God knows I hate to ask you, but—but," desperately, "if it weren't for you I don't know where I should be now. Dead, perhaps. I thought of everything—yes, and of everybody, and you were my only chance. That's why I came. I told Mr. Hazen you were sick. It was a lie, of course, but I had to give *some* excuse. And I had to get to you just as soon as I could. When I tell you why you'll understand. . . . Oh, I'm in a hell of a mess! It's terrible—terrible!"

He sprang from the chair and began to pace up and down the room. Heath was, for the moment, startled out of his morose and savagely resentful broodings. His mind hurriedly considered all sorts of possibilities.

"Mess?" he repeated. "What mess? You and that Hazen girl—?"

Raymond wheeled. His fists clenched.

"Say, look here!" he shouted, fiercely. "Don't you dare think anything like that. Don't you dare!"

"Be still. . . . Well, what is it then?"

"It's—it's money," desperately. "Money, that's what it is. I've got to have two thousand dollars and I've got to have it before the middle of next week. If I don't, I'll—why, if I don't they'll put me in prison, probably. Anyhow, I'll lose my job and all my chance in life—and Ruth—and—Oh, my God, what will become of me!"

He stopped his pacing and clutched wildly at his hair. John Heath leaned forward, was about to rise. Then he slowly leaned back again. His frown grew blacker than ever.

"Prison!" he repeated, under his breath. "They'll put you in prison? . . . Look here, young fellow, what in the devil—? Here! Stop that circus business and sit down. Sit down, do you hear! Let's hear the whole of this. What

have you been doin' that's liable to land you in—prison? Out with it—all of it. Now then!"

Raymond sat down. He bent forward, his head in his hands.

"Oh, how can I tell you?" he groaned. "How can I?"

"Come here to tell, didn't you?"

"Yes. Yes, I did, but—oh, it seems as if I couldn't!"

"You've got to. Go on."

There were more protestations, and many false beginnings, but at last the story was told. Even without the excuses, self-recriminations and pleas for forgiveness, it was a long one. John Heath did not understand all its details, but he was able to understand enough. There was nothing particularly novel in it; it had all happened before, under similar circumstances, to numbers of young men surrounded by money and the atmosphere of money easily won. In those days of "war brides" and fortunes made in a hurry it was happening in every city in the land.

The office of Hazen and Company was crowded daily by speculators who were taking "fliers" in the market. Steel stocks, shares in munition companies, all sorts of so-called securities affected by the Great War in Europe, were climbing and falling feverishly. It was perfectly natural that youth engaged in handling of these, who saw thousands of dollars gained almost overnight, should catch the get-rich-quick disease. Raymond and two friends of his, young men employed in other brokerage affairs, caught it. The other two were sons of well-to-do families, fellows with some money of their own, but who, at the Hazen home and in the round of social gayety to which Sam Hazen and his daughter had introduced their protégé, Raymond met and knew and liked. And they liked him.

They, of course, knew nothing of the extent of his financial resources, nothing of John Heath or Nauticook. They knew him as an ex-football star, and a good fellow, one who

always seemed willing and able to hold up his end. He was popular with every one, with both sexes, young and old. And they had a grand scheme to make a hundred thousand or so in short order. Liking Raymond they asked him to go into the scheme with them. Raymond was tempted. Holding up his end in that crowd was an expensive business. There were unpaid bills in his drawer at his room, too many of them.

He had already, and on his own hook, taken a flier in the market, a small one but profitable. Leaving the unpaid bills to remain in the drawer, he had taken a month's salary and bought, on a margin, a few shares in a certain steel company. Those shares had risen, just as his "tip" promised they would do, and he had cleared over seven hundred dollars. A part of this sum had taken care of those bills. The rest he had in reserve.

He had got this far in his story when John Heath interrupted for the first time.

"Hold on," he broke in. "You made over seven hundred, you say? First I've heard of it. Last letter I had from you I judged you was more or less hard up."

"I know—I know. This was before that. I didn't write you about it, Uncle John. I was afraid you would be sore because I had taken such a risk. It was rotten of me not to tell you, but this whole business is rotten. I've been a rotter all through. A rotter is what I am, I guess."

"Never mind what you are. Go on."

The two young chaps, the name of one was Rhodes, pooled their ready money and, with Raymond, who contributed what was left of his seven hundred, formed what they were pleased to call a syndicate for further speculation. Their first purchase was Moravian Steel. They plunged in that, always on a margin of course, and, as Raymond expressed it, "cleaned up" nearly three thousand. It was easy and

millions more were awaiting them. So, with all their winnings they bought Blodgett Arms.

"It looked awfully good, Uncle John. Honestly it did! We had had a straight tip—on the quiet, of course—that Blodgett was to be given a whale of a contract by the Allies. It looked sure; by George, it *was* sure! And the stock was dead cheap, or everybody in the know thought it was. The other fellows—Rhodes and Taylor—wanted to buy every share we could possibly grab. They had more money than I had. Their people are rich, you see."

"I see. . . . Hmph! Never told 'em how rich your folks was, did you?"

"No-o, I—I didn't. You see—"

"I see plain enough," dryly. "Get along with it."

Raymond, besides contributing his Moravian profits to the pool, borrowed two thousand dollars of young Rhodes. Again Heath asked a question.

"What security did you give him?" he asked.

"Why, not any—then. He could spare it, and we were pals, you know. He let me have it on my note. I thought it was a darned sporting thing for him to do. And it was, too."

"Sportin' is a good word. Well?"

"But it was sure, Uncle John; don't you see? Dead sure. We *couldn't* lose."

"Couldn't—but did. Go on."

Raymond went on. The hardest part was coming and the perspiration stood in drops on his forehead as he stammered and staggered through to the disastrous finish. The Blodgett Arms shares were purchased—always on margin, of course; you could buy so much more that way—and then—well, then, the Blodgett Company was not given the contract and there was a slump and the stock went off in price, went down and down until it became necessary to put up more margin or lose everything.

And then young Rhodes had asked Raymond to pay the two thousand dollar note.

"You can't blame him, Uncle John. Don't you see you can't? His people didn't know he had been speculating any more than—well, than you did. He had to have it to protect himself. And I couldn't pay it. I didn't have anything but my salary, and what did that amount to? And if we could hang on, just hang on a little while, Blodgett was sure to go up again. It was sure to—everybody said so. In fact, it has begun to go up now—a little. And I—I was almost crazy. I could stand losing all I'd made in Moravian, but I couldn't stand seeing Rhodes go broke when it was all my fault, when he had been so darned square and generous with me. So—so— Oh, how *can* I tell you! I've been dreading this for—for days and days!"

"You *are* tellin' me. Tell the rest."

There was, among the Hazen customers, a wealthy man named Gilder, whose account with the Hazen house ran close to a million and who had, among his securities deposited there in their keeping, ten one thousand United States Government bonds. Raymond—who had become a trusted employee by this time—had access to the vaults where securities were deposited. In desperation he had taken two of those bonds from the Gilder box and had given them to Rhodes in payment of the note. Gilder was supposed to be in the Philippines and not expected back for months.

"And then—and then—last Saturday it was," gasped Raymond, mopping his forehead, "we had a telegram from him. He was in San Francisco and would be in New York inside of a fortnight. I went nutty when I saw that telegram. The first thing I did was to see Rhodes and tell him I must have those bonds right away. He didn't have them; they had been put up, with the rest of what he and Taylor and I owned, as margin on our Blodgett account. And he had no money of his own, so—so—"

"Wait! Have you ever told him those bonds didn't belong to you? That you stole 'em?"

It was cruelly put, but John Heath was in a cruel mood. He had come back to Nauticook crushed, humiliated, raging with disillusion and chagrin, hating the Condon name and all who bore it, hating himself as a soft-headed, easy dupe. The sight of this boy—the son who was not his son—had fanned the fire. Even had there been no further humiliation he would have been cruel and hard at this psychological moment. And now he was learning that the son—Ralph Condon's son—was as crooked a rascal as his father, a liar and a deceiver like his mother. A thief! Through the long confession his frown had grown blacker and deeper. His tone, as he asked his questions, was sneering and sarcastic. There was no pity in his heart just then. This son of a blackguard and a common woman was a thief. Well, why not?

Raymond winced at the word "stole" and at the tone, but he answered frankly and promptly.

"No," he said. "I haven't told any one until now. You are the only one who knows it, Uncle John. I was plumb crazy. I haven't slept for nights. You were the only hope I could think of. I remembered what you said about coming to you if I were in trouble. I thought—I hoped you might let me have the two thousand. I shan't have to have it long; I know I shan't. If you will lend it to me I can go back to New York and give the money to Rhodes. He will get the bonds from those brokers—give them the money instead. I can put those bonds back in Gilder's box and—and no one will ever know."

Heath's lip curled. "Till the next time."

"There won't be a next time. I swear there won't. Blodgett Arms is going up and it will keep on going up. It is sure to; we—Rhodes and Taylor, I mean—will make a big profit in it some day sure. . . . But that doesn't make any difference—to me it doesn't. I am through gambling. I'll

never touch the market again, I'll give you my oath on that, Uncle John. I've had my lesson. If I can only just keep Mr. Hazen and—and Ruth from finding out. That's all I want. If only—only you *could*—"

"Wait. You've dragged in the Hazen girl's name half-a-dozen times. What's she got to do with it? What is there between you and her?"

"She—she and I are engaged."

"Engaged! Engaged to be *married?*"

"Yes. . . . That's what it amounts to, I suppose."

"Huh! . . . What have you got to be married on?"

"Nothing now, of course."

"So I'd say. Does Hazen know about this—er—engagement?"

"No one knows it. We haven't told any one."

"I notice you've never told me. Good hand at keepin' secrets, you are. Runs in the family, I guess. Fast worker with the women. Well, that might be expected, too."

Raymond did not understand, of course, nor did he ask for the meaning behind the sneer. He had hurried home to this uncle of his, just as he had hurried in the days when he was a schoolboy in trouble, when, as a last sure resort, there was always Uncle John in the background, Uncle John to pull him through. Coming home now, with this miserable confession of disgrace and dishonesty, had been frightfully hard, but it was the confessing he had dreaded most. Vaguely, with the limited comprehension of youth, he had realized something of John Heath's affection and self-sacrificing indulgence, the man's pride in and love for him. He knew what a shock and disappointment his confession was bound to bring. He realized something of this, but never once had he doubted forgiveness, nor the kindly, wise counsel to follow. Uncle John would stand by him—would, somehow or other, pull him out of the quicksand.

But this was not at all the Uncle John he had known.

Not a word of sympathy, not a hint of forgiveness, not even a welcoming handshake. Instead cutting jibes, brusque questions and commands, a hard mouth and forbidding scowl. Through the latter part of his long story his tone had become more and more dull and lifeless. He was losing hope.

The sneering reception of the news of his love affair with Ruth Hazen was the final straw. It stirred him to angry resentment.

"I don't know what you mean by that," he said, sullenly. "I don't care, either. Suppose we keep her name out of this, she hasn't anything to do with it. . . . Well, now you know the whole thing. That's all there is. Either I get that two thousand right away, before Gilder gets back next week, or—it's the end. The end of me, anyhow."

John Heath pulled at his mustache.

"So you expected I'd put up the two thousand for you, eh?" he said.

"I hoped you might lend it to me—yes."

"Hmph! Never crossed your mind that I might not have that amount of money in my breeches pocket, I presume likely?"

"Why—what do you mean? I—I always thought—"

"Thought I had a private money factory somewheres on the premises, probably. I ain't. I haven't been able to put by a dollar for the last six months. I was figurin' on goin' back to boat fishin' again to help keep my head above water."

"But you have always given me— You have never told me—"

"I never told you—no. And I always gave. What do you think it has cost me the last four years or so to pay your college bills and expenses and clothes and club bills and one thing and 'nother? I had a fair-sized wad laid by before I started in on that foolishness. . . . Yes," with a sudden snap of the jaws, "foolishness was what I said. That's what it has turned out to be, hasn't it? What have I got to show

for it now? You, a well-educated, dressed-up, slick, smart—crook. Good Lord! If there was a damn-fool show in the county I'd take first prize. It makes me sick to think about myself. All my life a monkey on the end of somebody else's string—and now this—*you!* All nothin'. Tut, tut!"

He rose, kicked the chair from behind him, and, jamming his fists into the pockets of his coat, turned his back upon the miserable figure at the other side of the table.

"Gosh" he growled, between his teeth, "it would be funny if it wasn't so darned pitiful."

Raymond was silent, sitting with his head bowed and his gaze fixed upon the pattern of the hooked rug beneath his feet. At last he spoke, but without looking up.

"Well," he muttered, with a shrug, "that's that."

Heath turned. "What's what?" he demanded.

"Oh, everything, I guess. I'm through, that's all."

"Through?"

"You're through, anyhow, through with me. I don't blame you much. I am what you just called me, I suppose, a crook. I didn't mean to be, but I am. I'm sorry."

"Of course you're sorry, but bein' sorry won't keep you out of jail."

"Don't worry, I shan't go there."

"You won't? Why not? If you don't put those bonds back before the man that owns 'em finds out they're missin', I'd say jail was about where you would go."

"I know—but—that's all right."

Heath walked to the window and back again.

"How do you figure I'm going to raise two thousand dollars, at a day's notice, and with nothin' to raise it on?" he demanded.

"I don't expect you to—now. I thought you had it in the bank."

"Well, I haven't. No, nor a quarter of it."

"I understand. I'm sorry I troubled you. I certainly have

made a mess of things. Guess I didn't realize how much of a mess I was myself, but you've made that plain. Too bad, Uncle John. Looks as if I was your one big mistake."

"My *one* mistake! Huh! That's another joke."

Again he walked to the window. After standing there for an interval, he wheeled and crossed the room to the door of his own bedroom.

"I'm goin' to turn in," he announced, gruffly. "Can't talk —no, nor think—any more now, and I shan't try to. Go to bed. You and I'll have another session in the mornin'."

Raymond did not answer, nor did he look up.

"Do you hear? I say we'll have another talk to-morrow mornin'."

"I heard you."

"All right. Only don't you bank on anything comin' of it. I don't see how anything can. The way it looks now—yes, and the way I feel now—I guess likely you'll have to take your medicine."

He jerked open the bedroom door. Raymond looked up then. His face was very white.

"Good night, Uncle John," he said.

"Huh? . . . Oh, well—good night."

John Heath lit the lamp in his room, took off his coat and vest and sat heavily down in the small rocker by the head of his bed. He had slept scarcely at all for the two nights previous to this one. He had eaten almost nothing for two days. He was faint, utterly exhausted, and his nerves were like taut wires. The suspicions aroused by his interview with Fairweather; the long ride, with those suspicions for company, to Brayton; the day there, when suspicion became certainty; then the journey to Boston; and, at last, the return home—to this. It had been hell from the beginning to the end—and what an end!

He leaned back in the rocker and closed his eyes. He had

stated nothing but the truth when he had said he could talk nor think no more that night. He was utterly exhausted, mentally and physically. He was too completely worn out even to go through with the labor of undressing. He removed his collar and tie, kicked off his shoes, and, extinguishing the light, threw himself upon the bed.

He could not think clearly, he was determined not to think, and yet he could do nothing else. It seemed impossible, the whole of it. It was too complete, too well-rounded and finished, to be real. The hand had been almost too well played. Fate, or the Almighty or the devil—whoever or whatever was responsible—had certainly not lost a trick. There was nothing lacking. This business of Raymond's was an almost unnecessary touch, an anti-climax.

A crook and a thief! This boy—his Raymond. He was not his, of course—he knew that now—but habit was strong and he could not yet completely rid himself of the feeling of proprietorship, of responsibility. All these years he had had scarcely a thought, a plan, a hope or ambition, that was not concerned with or built upon Raymond or Raymond's future. That was all over and done with now, it was no concern of his what happened to Ralph Condon's and that woman's brat. Let him take his medicine, served him right. Why should John Heath worry because chickens came home to roost and heredity worked out just as might have been expected?

This was common sense, sound philosophy, justice, all that sort of thing. The trouble with it was that John Heath *was* worrying. After all, it was Raymond who was in trouble. Raymond who had come straight to him, counting on his help. Just as he had come so many times to be rescued from little troubles, now, when the big trouble was upon him, he came, hopeful, trusting, confident. Heath found himself reviewing the interview just ended. After all, the boy did not know what he knew. He must have been

amazed and shocked—yes, and frightfully disappointed. He had expected sympathy, at least. He must have.

The wind howled and the rain sluiced against the windows. John Heath, lying there on the bed, could not shake a picture from his mind, the picture of Raymond as he last saw him, sitting there by the table, pale, despairing, utterly wretched. The poor kid. No, he did not know.

Well, what was there to do? What ought he to do? He had, as he had said, but a few hundred dollars in the bank. He might raise the necessary two thousand on a mortgage, perhaps; Seth Crocker would let him have it, no doubt. But why should he risk the little he had left? He had sacrificed enough already, too much. It was not his affair now. Having considered another's welfare for years and years, why not consider his own for a change? Why continue to be the monkey at the end of the string? That woman's string!

Nevertheless, there was that picture. He could not get rid of it, nor the hopeless, pathetic wretchedness of Raymond's "Good night, Uncle John." What should he do? At that session in the morning it would have to be yes or no. There was no chance of compromise and no time for consideration.

If there was only some one to discuss the matter with. Some one who could face the problem calmly, without prejudice, and whose opinion was worth while. In all Nauticook he had not a real confidant. Nobody knew his secret and, more certainly, no one should ever know it now. If Susan Harwell knew she would be the one to turn to. Queer how much he had come to rely upon her counsel, her good judgment and "horse sense." Strange, for he had known her but a comparatively short time, how he counted upon her as a friend. And a woman, too; that was stranger than all.

The wind whined and whistled and the rain poured. With the picture of Raymond's face, wan and wretched, still before his eyes, John Heath's exhausted brain gradually ceased to

function. He dropped into a sleep which was almost a stupor.

Something woke him, something which sounded like the shutting of a door. He sat up on the bed and listened, but there was no other sound. The window was gray, it must be early morning. He rose to his feet, fumbled in the waistcoat lying upon the floor where he had thrown it, took his watch from the pocket and looked at it. He had not wound it, but it was still going. The time was quarter after six.

He went to the window and looked out. The wind had gone down but a light rain was still falling. It was dark and the dawn was but a promise. He found his slippers in the closet and put them on. Then he stepped out into the living room.

Curiously enough the problem with which he had been wrestling seemed settled—temporarily settled, at least. His sleep had been heavy and dreamless, but it had settled one question for him. Right or wrong, justice or no justice, he must keep that young fellow out of prison somehow. Whatever their relations might continue to be, even if—and he had thought seriously of it during his trip from Brayton—even if he went away from Nauticook without telling Raymond or any one else where he was going, still, before he went, that two thousand must be raised and handed to the boy. He would not leave that shame and disgrace to be gossiped about from one end of Ostable County to the other. For his own sake as well as Raymond's he would not do that.

Raymond was not in the living room, of course. He was upstairs in his own room. Probably he had not slept at all. Poor youngster. He had made a hash of things, but then the world was a hash. Might as well go up to that room now and tell him that he would see him through somehow.

He turned on the light. Then he noticed a slip of paper on the center table, propped against a book. He picked it up. There was writing upon it, a penciled scrawl.

DEAR UNCLE JOHN [he read]. You were dead right. I am a crook and a rotter. You've been too good to me, that's what's the matter, and look how I have paid you for it. You told me I must take my medicine. Well, I'm going to take it. Sorry for all the trouble I have made you. Love and good-by.

RAYMOND

The paper fell to the floor. John Heath stood still. "You told me to take my medicine. . . . I am going to take it."

Good God! Why—why—

He turned and bounded up the stairs. Raymond's room was empty, the bed had not been slept in.

He ran down again, through the dining room and kitchen, shouting, calling, stumbling. The door from the kitchen to the yard was unlocked. He flung it open and ran out.

"Raymond!" he cried. "Raymond!"

The morning was black and gloomy. He could see but a little way. Unheeding the rain, unconscious of it, he ran to the top of the knoll overlooking the fishhouse, the little wharf and the dim, murky expanse of the bay beyond.

No one in sight—no one. The beach—there was no one there. The wharf—ah, there was something on the wharf. A black something at the outer end, a crouched, huddled figure. Yes—yes—

"Raymond!" he yelled. The figure turned.

"Raymond!" shouted John Heath. "Is that you? What are you doin' there? . . . Here! Don't do that! Wait! Wait!"

But Raymond did not wait. He turned, leaned forward and leaped from the end of the pier into the water. The tide was running out, the streaks of foam showed dimly in the gray light.

John Heath did not wait either. He rushed down the slope and along the wharf, shouting as he came. He did not pause for an instant. At the end of the wharf one of his

slippers caught the stringpiece, his foot slipped. Instead of jumping, as he had meant, he fell sidewise and his head struck the mooring post where the *Sarepta* swung at the end of her rope.

He was conscious of the fall, but there his consciousness ended.

CHAPTER XVII

IT returned gradually. Little glimpses of daylight, followed by long stretches of darkness, like the occasional lifting and drawing of a curtain. The first few of these glimpses meant nothing to him. Then they began to have some meaning. He had been asleep and the vague, shadowy somethings, which it seemed he ought to remember and yet did not, were dreams. They must be, because he was in bed—his own bed—in his own room. It was morning too; late in the morning, for the sunshine was streaming in through the window. But his window was on the west side of the house and the sun did not shine in like that until afternoon. It could not be afternoon. What would he be doing in bed at that time of day?

He turned his head upon the pillow. Turning it was a tremendous effort: it seemed heavy, big, swollen. With another effort he raised his hand to his forehead and touched, not flesh but cloth.

Then he was aware of a rustle, a movement near the bed. A voice said:

"There, there! you mustn't do that, you know. Lie still."

He did not lie still, of course. Being John Heath he continued to move.

"Who's that?" he asked, feebly.

A figure came to the bedside and bent over him. He gazed up at the face with a troubled stare.

"Who—? What—?"

"Sshh! It's all right. Just be still. You're better, gettin' better every minute, thank goodness. Now you behave yourself and I'll get you your medicine."

The figure moved away. He turned his head still further.

"Now what am I in bed for?" he muttered. "And," louder, "what in the devil are you doin' here?"

Susan Harwell laughed. She was back again, a tumbler in one hand and a teaspoon in the other.

"Now I know you're better," she declared. "When a man swears as natural as all that he's gettin' well fast. . . . Here! take this."

She was holding the spoon to his lips. He tried to avoid it but finally swallowed its contents as the easiest way of getting rid of a nuisance.

"Now," he persisted, "maybe you'll answer me. What am I doin' in bed?"

"You're in bed because that's the place where a sick man ought to be."

"Sick? Who said I was sick?"

"Well, the doctor did for one. He might not be so sure of it if he heard you beginnin' to call on the Old Harry. That's the most hopeful symptom you've developed yet, John Heath."

"But how could I be sick? What's the matter with me?"

"There, there! There's plenty of time to tell you about that. You stop talkin' and rest."

"Rest be hanged! I want to talk."

"Yes, yes, of course, but you mustn't, not yet. If you say another word I'll go straight out and telephone the doctor. If I can't keep you quiet alone he and I together will have a try at it. Now be real still and I'll change your bandage."

Bandage! That was why his head felt so large and heavy, why his fingers had touched cloth when they fumbled at his forehead. He could not understand. He tried to remember, but remembering was still a hopeless task. He lay quiet while she bathed his head and changed the wrappings. All the time he was gazing at her with a puckered frown.

"I'd like to know," he murmured, weakly, "what you're

doin' here. I—I can't make it out. I can't make anything out."

"You will pretty soon. . . . There! Now I'm goin' to get you your beef tea. I'll be back in a jiffy. Don't you so much as try to think till I come back."

He did try, but without avail. When she returned he drank the cup of broth obediently.

"How did it taste?" she asked him.

"Like more."

"Good enough. That's another encouragin' sign. Now go to sleep."

He had no intention of sleeping, but he did. Then followed more liftings and drawings of the curtain. The following morning, however, when Mrs. Harwell tiptoed into the room, he was awaiting her with wide open eyes.

"Where's Raymond?" he demanded, sharply.

She was startled.

"Goodness gracious, you scared me!" she exclaimed. "I didn't know you was awake."

"I am. High time, too. Where's Raymond?"

"Sshh! You mustn't holler like that. Raymond is all right."

"All *right?* What do you mean? Where is he?"

"He—well, he isn't here just now, but he's all right. Truly he is, John. . . . Please! you mustn't move. Listen: if you'll lie still I'll tell you all about him, all about everything."

He had raised himself upon one elbow. Now he sank back again with a groan.

"Puny as a sick pullet," he growled, disgustedly. "What is the matter with me? . . . Oh, never mind! It's Raymond I want to know about. You say he's all right, but he ain't here. What does that mean? Where is he?"

"He's—well, he is in New York just now, but he'll be back again to-morrow."

"In New York! Why—why, he can't be! Last night, he— Lord above, woman, what kind of lies are you tellin'? Where's that boy? You tell me the truth or I'll climb out of this bed and learn it somewhere."

He was trying to do so, but she held him fast.

"No, you won't," she declared, with firm good humor. "You'll stay right there. I am tellin' you the truth. Raymond is as well as—I was goin' to say as you are, but I'll say as I am, which is truer. He went to New York day before yesterday; he had important things to attend to there. He stayed here until the doctor was certain sure that you was out of danger and gettin' along all right. He is comin' back to-morrow."

"How do you know he is?"

"Because I had a telegram from him. I'll show it to you by and by."

"Show it to me now. Where is it?"

He was shouting again. She produced the telegram from the bosom of her dress.

"Will you promise to lie quiet if I read it to you?" she asked. "You'd better, if you want to hear it. . . . Now listen. It says: 'Everything all right here. Tell Uncle John trouble ended. Coming Nauticook Wednesday. Raymond.' There! that proves I can tell the truth once in a while, doesn't it? Now aren't you ashamed of yourself, John Heath?"

She was laughing as she asked the question. He did not laugh.

"Comin' Wednesday?" he repeated. "Why—why, I thought you said he would be here to-morrow?"

"So I did. To-day is Tuesday."

"Tuesday!" He struggled with a problem in mental arithmetic. "I'm worse than sick—I'm crazy," he groaned, a moment later. "I went to Boston Monday, and to Brayton Tuesday, and got home here Wednesday night—last night.

Raymond was here and—and— Oh, I'm loony! No wonder you tied up my head."

His bewilderment was pathetic. She leaned forward and patted his arm.

"Shh, shh," she said, gently. "You've been sick, real sick, and you've lost track of time, that's all. I'd like to tell you all about it, but—well, I declare I don't know what Dr. Parker will say to me if I do."

For the first time the corner of his lip lifted in a smile.

"'Twon't be a patch on what *I'll* say to him if he tries to stop you," he vowed, grimly. "Go on, Susan, tell me. I'll behave myself. You've got me where I can't do anything else."

"Glad you realize it," with one of her brisk nods. "Well, this is what happened, so far as I know. As to that, I guess likely I know as much or more than anybody else—except you and Raymond, of course."

The previous Thursday morning she had been awakened, in her room at the Bangs cottage, by the ringing of the telephone bell. The telephone was a comparatively recent addition to the Bangs home, having been installed at Miss Carver's suggestion.

"It was just about daylight," she went on, "and I couldn't imagine who was callin' us at that unearthly time. However, soon as I got my eyes open and my senses together, I scampered downstairs to answer that bell, for 'twas ringin' like all possessed. Mrs. Bangs sang out from her room to ask what was the matter and Becky—that's Miss Carver, of course—was doin' the same from hers. I told 'em to stay where they was, for I was on my way to find out. Well, it was Raymond and he was in a dreadful state. Near as I could learn from what he was tryin' to tell me you had fell off the end of your wharf down yonder and hit your head on a post or somethin'. No, you wasn't dead—not yet, but he was afraid you might die any minute, and he had to have

help and I was the first one he'd thought of. Could I come right down? Well, of course I could and I did."

When she reached Seven-up Dr. Parker was already there; Raymond had phoned him immediately after calling her. John Heath was lying unconscious on the floor of the living room and the doctor was working over him when she arrived. Concussion of the brain was his hasty diagnosis, although whether slight or serious he could not determine until after a more careful examination. Between them—Raymond was himself too prostrated to render much assistance—they removed the patient's soaked garments and got him to bed in his own room.

Here Heath broke in with his first interruption.

"Wait," he ordered. "Did Raymond tell you how—"

"Stop. Let me do the talkin'. Yes, he did tell us, after a spell. We had pretty nigh as bad a time with him as we had with you; worse, in a way, for you didn't know what was goin' on and he did. He was just as soaked with that ice water as you, and he was all but crazy besides. However, bein' young, and not havin' bumped his head like a certain person we know of who a body might think was old enough to take care of himself, he was all right in a little while. Then the doctor—"

"Darn the doctor! I want to know what Raymond told you. Can't you understand? What did he—"

"Hush! If you are goin' to interrupt this way I shall march straight off and leave you. Raymond told us—after we'd got him calmed down and straightened around so he was fit to tell anything—that he had heard you down at the end of the wharf callin' his name. He was there and, just then, you slipped and fell into the water. He thinks you must have hit your head on the moorin' post when you fell. He jumped after you and dragged you ashore. How he did it, with the tide runnin' out the way it was, I don't know—but he did. And how he ever managed to haul you up to this

house all alone is another miracle. Then he rang me up and, a minute afterwards, the doctor. There, that's all there is to tell. More than Dr. Parker will think I ought to have told, I don't doubt."

John Heath lay quiet for a brief interval.

"And that's all he told you?" he queried, with sharp suspicion.

"Who—Raymond? Yes, that's all he told either of us—then."

"Eh? Then? Did he tell you more later?"

"Why—why no, of course he didn't. That was enough, I should think."

"What did you mean by 'then'?"

"Oh—I don't know. I presume likely I said it just—oh, just because I did, that's all. The more talkin' I do the less chance to talk you have. And you've talked too much already."

He was gazing at her, with the same puzzled, suspicious stare. To her relief, however, his next question had nothing to do with Raymond's story.

"That was Thursday mornin', you say?" he muttered.

"Yes."

"And you tell me to-day's Tuesday. Have I been in this bed pretty nigh a week?"

"Lackin' two days—yes."

"Hmph! You been tendin' me all that time?"

"Somebody had to attend to you, didn't they?"

"How about tendin' to your own job up to Mrs. Bangs's?"

"There's two of 'em there to attend to that. Mrs. Bangs understands. She's told me to stay here just as long as necessary."

Another interval. Then: "Let me see that telegram?"

She held it before his eyes. He read it carefully.

"I don't understand," he muttered, weakly. "'Trouble ended.' I can't make it out."

"I'll read it to you once more if you want me to."

"No, no; I don't mean the telegram, I mean the whole business. I can't understand how it can be. It sounds all nothin' to me."

"That's because you've been sick. You're gainin' strength every minute now though, the doctor says so. I only hope I haven't set you back talkin' all this rigmarole. Now you take a nap while I get your breakfast."

"Nap nothin'. I want to get out of this bed. I've got to. There's things for me to see to."

"The one thing you've got to see to is gettin' your strength back. Breakfast'll help that. Aren't you hungry?"

"Eh? Ain't had time to think whether I am or not."

"You think now. I won't keep you waitin' long."

Breakfast, when it came, tasted astonishingly good. After it was eaten, and in spite of his protestations that he should do nothing of the kind, he again fell asleep. The doctor came at eleven and was delighted to find his patient so far on the upward road.

"You are all right now," he said. "A crack on the head, when it's as tough a head as yours, doesn't mean much. You may sit up a little while to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow! I'm goin' to *get* up right now."

Susan Harwell laughed. "He won't, Doctor," she declared. "I can handle him for a while yet."

Wednesday morning he was so much stronger that he was permitted to sit in a chair by the window. Every few minutes he asked the time. It crawled. The train was not due until noon and Raymond, if he kept his promise, was coming on that train. Until he and Raymond met, until he learned, from the boy's lips, what the telegram meant, how the trouble had ended—if it really had ended—he could think of almost nothing else.

The blow which had fallen upon him in Brayton, the disclosure of Raymond's parentage and of the trick which had

made him, Heath, a dupe and a cat's-paw through the years, seemed oddly inconsequential now. The hatred and fierce resentment returned when he thought of his wife, but he thought of her only occasionally. And toward her son—yes, and Condon's son—he felt no hatred nor resentment. All that had vanished in a night, the night when he had left the young man sitting, miserable and alone, in the living room; when he had bade him take his medicine.

Coming out into that room again next morning his one settled determination had been to tell Raymond that he need worry no longer. That he might count on his Uncle John to see him through, just as he always had. And then—

Suppose he had not heard that door shut. Suppose he had not gone out into the rain at that moment and seen Raymond standing there on the pier. Suppose he had been too late.

And he had been too late, in reality. His frantic rush and plunge had accomplished nothing. He had bungled that, too. He had not saved Raymond; it was Raymond who had saved him.

Some one was coming down the lane from the village. It could not be Raymond; the train was not due for another hour. Why, yes, it was Lorenzo Weeks. Coming to inquire after him, of course. Poor old Lo, he had his troubles. And a woman was responsible for them, too. Hitherto John Heath's pity for his ex-hired man had been pretty well smothered by the conviction that the latter had got only what was coming to him and that it served him right. Now he was conscious of a wave of sympathy. Poor old Lo, he was just another monkey on the end of a string. The sympathy was almost fraternal.

He heard voices in the kitchen. Susan Harwell said: "No, I'm afraid you can't, Mr. Weeks. He's a lot better and he's gettin' along splendidly, but I don't believe the doctor would want him to see anybody yet."

Heath called. "It's all right, Susan. Tell him to come ahead in."

She answered the hail. "It's just that Weeks man," she explained, in a whisper. "He doesn't want anything in particular and he'll talk forever."

"No, he won't, I'll shut him off when I get tired. Let him in. He'll help pass the time, if nothin' more. Come aboard, Lo!"

Lorenzo entered, cap in hand and on tiptoe. Judging by his expression he might have been answering the undertaker's invitation to a final view of the departed. Heath chuckled.

"When you buy new shoes, Lo," he observed, "you ought to buy 'em comf'table. You've lived with your feet long enough not to be proud of 'em."

Mr. Weeks sank back on his heels. He looked at the speaker, then at his feet, and then at Susan Harwell.

"I—I thought you said he'd got his brains back," he gasped, helplessly.

Mrs. Harwell laughed. "He never lost 'em, so far as I know," she declared.

"Then—then what kind of numb talk—?"

Heath broke in. "Seein' you teeterin' around on your toes made me think your shoes must hurt you," he explained. "There, there, Lo, brighten up. This ain't my funeral—not yet. Glad to see you. Pull up a chair and sit down."

Lorenzo, apparently relieved though still a trifle doubtful, dropped his cap on the floor and reached for a chair. Susan walked to the door.

"I'll leave you two alone for a little while," she said. "You mustn't stay too long, Mr. Weeks, remember that."

"Oh, I—I ain't cal'latin' to stay but a few minutes. You can dely—I mean repend on me, Mrs. Harwell."

"Um-hm. Well, if I find I can't I'll depend on myself. I'll see that you don't stay too long."

She went out, closing the door after her.

"Well, Lo," inquired Heath, cheerfully, "how are you headin' these days?"

Lorenzo shuddered. "Don't say head to me, Hi Heath," he remonstrated. "Seein' you sittin' there with your own head all done up like a bundle of washin' don't make me feel funny, I tell you that."

"Made *me* feel funny for a spell. Fun's all over now though."

"Salvation to mercy, I'm glad to hear you say so. When they told me you'd fell off that wharf and stove the broadside of your skull in on that moorin' post, thinks I, 'That's the end. That's what might have been expected.'"

"Expected! Hmph! I know one that didn't expect it. What do you mean?"

"I mean that that, or somethin' like it, might have been expected with you livin' all sole alone the way you've been. I told Huldy so. Says I, 'In a way it's our fault. We'd never ought to have gone off and left him the way we done. He ain't fit to take care of himself and never was. If it hadn't been for me, standin' watch, as you might say, down to that place night and day, 'twould have happened long ago.' Yes, sir, them's the identical words I said. Said 'em with my own mouth."

"Um-hm. Well, then she said somethin' with her mouth, didn't she?"

Mr. Weeks blinked and sighed. He did not pursue the subject.

"How did you ever come to do it, Hi?" he demanded, resentfully. "Many times as you've been on that wharf, all kind of weather, and then to fall off of it—and with the tide runnin' out too."

"Yes, that was careless, I own up. Trouble was I started to fall before I realized about the tide. Next time I'll look in the almanac."

"Next time! Aw, Hi, quit your foolin', won't you. If you'd just realize how scared I've been. And everybody else has been too. They ain't talked of nothin' else up to the post office—and the club too, they tell me. Nobody can't understand how it happened. 'Cordin' to Raymond you just fell off and he jumped after you. That's all he'll say."

"Enough, isn't it? I fell in and he hauled me out. Probably he's as ashamed of it as I am. Don't bother me any more. I don't want to talk about it."

"But, Hi—"

"Shh! . . . How are things up at the heart laundry?"

"Heart laundry?"

"Yes, yes; up at your house? Everything pure and peaceful as usual?"

Lorenzo's face lost its look of anxious curiosity. He shuddered, sighed, and slowly shook his head.

"Don't know," he muttered, miserably.

"Don't *know?* You live there, don't you?"

"Not since yesterday I don't."

John Heath stared at him. Lorenzo tried to meet the stare, then gave it up and looked at the floor. He shuffled his feet. His bosom heaved with another long sigh.

Heath leaned toward him.

"What's all this, Lo?" he demanded. "You're in trouble, of course. Tell me what it is—that is, if you feel like it. Probably I can't help you, but I will if I can."

Lorenzo's next sigh ended in a groan. "I don't know's I'd ought to pester you with it, Hi," he faltered. "I had it in my mind to when I started down here, but Mrs. Harwell she said you was so rickety and feeble—"

"All nothin'. I'm fit enough. Heave ahead and tell."

It seemed that a series of domestic squalls in the Weeks domicile had culminated in a hurricane on the forenoon of the previous day. Lorenzo's narrative was disjointed and at times almost incoherent, but Heath gathered that the

Reverend Mr. Jacobs, leader of the Jake section of the Society of the Pure in Heart, was the storm center. He was a too frequent visitor at the Weeks home. He came, not only on meeting evenings and on Sundays, but at all times, every day and sometimes two or three times a day. Even the browbeaten and long-suffering Lorenzo had finally been driven to remonstrate.

"There's all kinds of talk stirrin', Hi," he explained. "Oh, I don't mean about him and Huldy, though I don't doubt there's consider'ble of that—there would be in Nauticook, you know—but I mean about this Jacobs critter himself. The Pure in Hearters they hired him for minister without knowin' too much about him, except that he come there one Sunday and preached a sermon that just about handed the Methodists and Congregationalists and all the other outside church folks one-way tickets to brimstone. Course that made a big hit, so they engaged him right off."

"Yes, yes," impatiently, "I've heard all that before. Go on."

The general satisfaction with the new leader lasted but a short time. Then followed the whispers and rumors leading to the split in the ranks of the Pure in Heart. The Jakes made the Weeks house their headquarters and the Anti-Jakes struggled along at the Bethel. But they were by no means contented with that. They had been according to Lorenzo, busily engaged in looking into the record of the Reverend Mr. Jacobs. He was not, so they learned, nor had he ever been, an ordained clergyman of any denomination. He had solicited insurance, sold subscription books, and, prior to that, had been a vendor of salves and nostrums.

"Yes, sir," declared Weeks, "'cordin' to their tell he traveled along with one of them Injun medicine shows. You know the kind, Hi: Where they stand up, under them torch-lights, and holler about 'Comanchee Bitters' and 'Injun 'Int-ment' and the like of that. Yes, sir, he done that for a long

spell. Reg'lar hard ticket, so they say. Well, naturally, they've spread what they've found out from one end of town to the other, and all hands are laughin'. It's got so I can't come nigh the main road without the gang settin' up a whoop. I'm ashamed—right down ashamed, I am."

"What does Jacobs say to all that?"

"Says it a passel of lies, of course. What else would he say? But some of the folks—some that was strong Jakes, too—they've begun to believe it. Last meetin' we had—Sunday night 'twas—there wa'n't much more'n a handful there; and they was the ones that hardly ever put more'n a cent in the collection box. He's on his last legs, that's what *he* is."

"What does your wife think of it?"

Lorenzo's voice jumped an octave. He thumped the arm of his chair.

"Say?" he repeated shrilly, his pale little eyes flashing. "You'd *think* she'd say: 'Git out of this house, you good-for-nothin', slick-tongued scalawag.' That's what you cal'late she'd say, wouldn't you? She don't though. She's stronger for him than ever, sticks up for him, calls him a persecuted tomarter, and all that kind of tommy-trash."

"*What!* Hold on! A persecuted—what? You mean martyr, don't you?"

"Eh? Yes, course that's what I mean. I ain't responsible for my language, these days. When I start talkin' about her and him I'm li'ble to say anything. And yesterday, by sin's mercy, I *did* say it! When I come into the kitchen and see them two—Huldy and him—a-settin' there with their heads together over a sermon he was readin' to her, thick as thieves, or twins—or—or two yolks in one egg, or somethin'—I flared right out. Says I, 'I've had enough of this. Either that patent-medicine swindle gets out of my house or I do—one or t'other.'"

He waved his clenched fists in the air and sputtered. Heath nodded emphatic approval.

"High time you said it," he observed. "Well, what did she say?"

Lorenzo's sputtering ceased, as if the question had turned off the tap. He drew his sleeve across his forehead and stared pathetically at the speaker.

"She? Well, if you'll believe it, all she said was: 'Tain't your house, it's mine. You can get out of it any time you've a mind to, and I don't care when you come back, neither.' That's what she said, Hi. Don't sound hardly as if it could be so, does it? Her own married husband!"

"Huh! I ain't surprised to death. Well. What next?"

"There wasn't no next. I got out and I ain't been back since. I—I slept down to my cousin's at South Nauticook last night. I can't sponge on them forever, though. They're poor folks and they can't afford it. That's part of what I cruised down here to see you about, Hi. Course I wanted to find out how you was gettin' along, but I wanted to ask your advice, too. What do you cal'late I'd ought to do now? I wish you'd tell me."

Heath pulled at his mustache. He was amused, but he was sorry too. Lorenzo's story was ridiculous and Lorenzo himself was very funny, but there was something pitiable about both.

"I declare I don't know, Lo," he replied. "You mustn't go back home, that's sure, not until she sends for you. You've laid your course, now stick to it."

"But—but suppose she don't send for me?"

"She will—if she wants you. You can stay with your cousins for a few more days, can't you?"

"Guess likely so, but I can't stay too long."

"What do they, those cousins of yours, tell you to do?"

"Hmph! Heman, that's my cousin-in-law, he says tell her to go to tunket and take her Jake with her. And

Marietta, she's my own cousin, says I was a big fool to marry her in the beginnin'."

"Does, eh? . . . Well, what do you think, yourself?"

Mr. Weeks shuffled his feet.

"I ain't the fust one to be made a fool of that way," he muttered, rebelliously.

John Heath leaned back in his chair.

"I'll say you ain't," he vowed, with grim emphasis. "There, there! You better run along, I guess likely; I'm expectin' the doctor—or somebody—pretty soon. You stay at your cousins' for a few days anyhow. If your wife finds out you mean business she may have a change of heart. Come in and report again pretty soon, say day after to-morrow. I'll help you any way I can, you can count on that."

"I know it. You're about the only sensible man I know in this town, Hi Heath. You never got tied up with *no* woman."

He was shuffling despondently to the door when Susan Harwell opened it and entered.

"Goin', are you?" she observed. "Well, I was just comin' in to say 'twas time you did. Now, John, you've been up long enough. You must get back into bed again and rest a while, if you want to be in good shape when—when your company comes."

The interview with Lorenzo had tired him more than he realized and to lie down again was a relief. He lay there waiting. It was almost train time. In a little while Raymond would be with him. There were so many vital questions to be asked and answered. In spite of the telegram's assurance that the trouble had ended and that everything was all right, he was distressed and anxious. How could it be ended? The Blodgett Arms stock might have had a sudden rise—that seemed the most probable answer. If it had not, then Raymond must have procured the necessary two thousand dollars somewhere. But from whom—and how?

He was still surmising and pondering when the door from the living room opened once more. Mrs. Harwell looked in. She was smiling.

"Well, here he is," she said. "Don't want to see him, of course, do you, John?"

She did not wait for a reply, but stepped back, leaving the door open. There was an instant of whispering outside. Heath caught the words "must be careful. . . . Not too much excitement." He moved impatiently in the bed. Why were they wasting time? Why didn't he come?

And then he came. The pair, John Heath and "Ralph Condon, Junior," looked at each other. It was the latter who spoke first.

"Hello, Uncle John!" he faltered, nervously.

John Heath issued an order.

"Shut that door," he said.

Raymond shut it. Heath held out a hand.

"How are you, boy?" he asked, gruffly. Raymond seized the hand.

"I'm all right. And you're getting on splendidly, aren't you? That—that's great. Mrs. Harwell says you will be as good as ever in a week."

"Good enough now, if they'd only think so. . . . Haul up a chair."

Raymond took the chair. He was very nervous and ill at ease. So, for that matter, was Heath. Ever since consciousness and memory came back to him he had been looking forward to this meeting. Now, with a hundred questions to ask, he found it difficult to ask one. It was hard even to speak at all. Sickness did take the strength out of a man, that was a fact. Made a baby of him. He lay there, gazing at the anxious young face before him and fighting for self-command and commonsense.

"Have a good trip over?" he blurted, after a moment.

"Yes. That is, I guess so. I didn't pay much attention to it. I was in too big a hurry to get here and—and see you."

"Um-hm. Well, you're here."

"Yes—yes, I am. Uncle John, I don't—oh, now I don't know how to say the things I ought to say to you."

"That's all right," gruffly. "Never mind that. I want to know—"

"But I do mind. I've been doing a lot of thinking since that night. Oh, by George, I have!"

"Huh, far's that goes I've been thinkin' some myself. . . . Now tell me about that trouble of yours in New York."

"Wait a minute. I want to get this off my chest first. Uncle John, you gave me some pretty plain talk that night. You made me see just what sort of a rotten, selfish pup I was—and had been. I was pretty well sunk before you started, but by the time you finished I was—well, the only decent thing that I could think of to do was—what I started to do. I mean—"

Heath broke in. "Stop!" he ordered, desperately. "Don't talk about that. Don't ever mention it again. Forget it. When I think of it—and I ain't been able to think of much else—I— Oh, for God's sake forget it and let me try to!"

He sank back upon the pillow with a groan. Raymond was alarmed.

"Hush, Uncle John," he begged. "I'm sorry. Mrs. Harwell said I mustn't excite you. . . . I just wanted you to understand how I feel, that's all. I'm ashamed."

"All right, boy, all right. You ain't the only one that's ashamed. Call it square. Forget it."

"Well—well, I won't talk about it any more, if you say so. But I shan't forget it—I can't. And I don't believe you will have cause to be ashamed of me any more. I know you won't."

"All right. . . . Now about that mess in New York. That's what I want to hear about."

"Why, that's all fixed. It's all settled. You know about it—you must."

"Know. How should I know?"

"Didn't you see my telegram? Mrs. Harwell told me she showed it to you."

"Yes, yes, she did. I saw that."

"Well, then. It was true, what I wired, I mean. Everything is fixed. The bonds are back with Mr. Gilder's other ones. I got them from Rhodes yesterday."

Heath's eyes closed. It was an instant before he opened them. Then he said, slowly: "They're back again, eh? Don't he know they've ever been away from there?"

"Nobody knows, nobody but you and me. They never will know either—unless I should decide to tell Ruth and Mr. Hazen some day. I may do that if—well, if anything comes of our engagement. If I ever get to the place where I feel I can afford to marry. It seems to me now that I ought to tell them then. I wouldn't want to start under false pretenses."

He paused. John Heath said nothing.

"Don't you think I'm right there, Uncle John?" anxiously.

Heath had not been thinking on that subject at all; his mind was centered upon the main question. The bonds were replaced; Raymond had got them from Rhodes—but how?

"Did that stock—Blodgett—whatever it was—go up?" he asked. It was the only answer he could imagine.

"Why, yes, it has gone up a good deal, but that doesn't interest me. I left orders to sell me out when the market opened this morning. I shall lose something, but I don't care. I'm through. No more stock gambling for me."

"All right, all right. But see here, how did you get hold of those bonds?"

"I paid Rhodes the two thousand dollars he lent me. Then he got them from the brokers. That's all there was to it."

"You paid him two thousand dollars! Where did you get the money?"

Raymond stared at him in bewildered surprise. "Why, you let me have it, of course," he said. "I couldn't have got it anywhere else."

Heath sat up in bed. "By the Lord A'mighty, boy," he gasped, "you or I must be—Sshh! Hold on! Let me get this straight. The last thing I remember is seein' you jump off that wharf and jumpin' after you. You asked me for that money and I said I couldn't let you have it. That's the very last thing. And now you say— What *do* you say?"

Raymond had a sudden flash of comprehension, or thought he had.

"I see," he said. "Of course. That's it—she hasn't told you."

"Who hasn't told me what? What in heaven's name are you talkin' about?"

"Mrs. Harwell. You've been so sick and weak that she hasn't told you yet. Pshaw! Probably I shouldn't have told you either. . . . Now, Uncle John, lie down again. It's all right. She and I will tell you all about it by and by."

But John Heath had no idea of lying down. He reached from the bed and, catching the young man by the shoulder, pushed him back into the chair from which he had risen.

"You'll tell me now," he vowed. "What is all this? Tell it to me—the whole of it."

"Oh—well, hang it all, I'll tell you if you only lie down and listen."

"I'll listen sittin' up. Go on. Don't leave out anything."

It happened that day on the morning of which John Heath had met with the accident. At first Raymond's only thought was for his uncle's life. Then, when the doctor had assured him that there was no immediate danger he began once more to consider his own critical situation, the crisis which had

driven him to attempted suicide. He thought and thought and the more he did so the more desperate he became.

"I—I—well, there for a few minutes," he confessed, "I was just about ready to try it again. It did look like the only way out. You had told me that I was a thief and I was of course, and it seemed just sense to end the whole thing. But —well, I couldn't, that's all. All I could think of—all I could see was you running down to that wharf, calling to me and —and—well, you know, Uncle John."

"All nothin'. Devil of a lot of good I did. I've told you not to talk about that. Go on."

"Well, there it was. You had pretty nearly killed yourself on my account and, here you were, half dead and maybe going to die, and I just couldn't be coward enough to leave you, that's all. That would be *too* damned mean. So I stuck around."

He could not help showing some of his desperation, however, and Susan Harwell, who had asked few questions concerning the causes leading up to the accident, guessed that he was in very serious trouble of some kind. And, at last, almost insane, he had partially confessed.

"It seemed as if I had to tell some one, so I told her. Not that I was a thief, or about the bonds or anything like that, but that I owed two thousand dollars and, if I didn't get it within a couple of days, I would lose everything I had, my job and everything. I told her I had come to ask you to lend me the money and you said you didn't have it. She laughed at that."

"Eh? . . . Laughed!"

"Why, yes. She said of course you had it. You had a good deal more than that in the bank, she knew. Probably you had been trying to frighten me, make me realize that I had been extravagant and careless about money, and wanted to teach me a lesson. You would have let me have it in the morning all right. No doubt your getting up so early and

coming out to look for me the way you did was just because you meant to tell me not to worry any longer. She knew you pretty well, she said, and that, as she expressed it, you were apt to go off half-cocked sometimes. Let her think it over a few minutes and she guessed she could contrive some way to draw the two thousand dollars from your account."

"She could! . . . Why, I told you— Never mind. Go on."

"So she went away to think and I—well, I sat around, like a dumb idiot, with my head in my hands. In a little while she was back again with a certified check in her name on the Nauticook National for two thousand dollars. No trouble at all, she told me. Mr. Crocker knew you and he knew her and, when she explained that you were hurt and might be sick for a good while, and needed the money, he drew the check and charged your account. It seemed a pretty slack way for a bank to do business, I thought, but I guess they're not as particular down here as they are in the cities. And Mr. Crocker *is* a close friend of yours, of course. . . . What did you say?"

"Me? Nothin'. Well?"

"At any rate I was too thankful to get the money to bother about how she got it. I sent the check by registered mail to Rhodes that afternoon and wrote him to get the bonds and have them ready for me. She urged me—Mrs. Harwell did —to go right on to New York myself, but I wouldn't. I couldn't leave you, you know. It was all my fault that you had been hurt and—well, no matter what happened to me I wasn't going to quit you then. I stayed until Sunday and then you were getting on so well that I felt I could leave. So I went to New York, squared everything, explained to Mr. Hazen that you were very sick and I must be with you and—well, now I'm back again. Mr. Hazen sent you his regards and told me to stay here as long as was necessary. There! that's the whole story. Now will you lie down?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE interview did not end here, of course. Raymond had more to say and said it. The two thousand dollars his uncle must not consider a gift, but merely a loan which he, Raymond, would repay as soon as he possibly could. If the Blodgett Arms stock opened at the figure at which it had closed the night before he left New York he would lose but little. Whatever he had left his Uncle John should have, and at once. As for the rest—well, he could save a little each week from his wages and he meant to do it.

"You're going to get that money, every cent of it," he declared. "I can pay that some day, and I shall. I wish I could pay some of the rest of it—a part of what you've blown in for my going to college and all that. It's a queer thing," he added, naïvely, "but I never realized, until this week or so, what a big expense I have been to you all this time. How much of a load I must have been for you to carry. I don't want to get slushy or anything, but, honestly, Uncle John, I— Oh, you know what I want to say."

Heath was as embarrassed as he was.

"Sure—sure; that's all right," he muttered, hastily. "Much my fault as 'twas yours. I'm no kind of a man to bring up a boy anyhow."

Susan came in just then. The doctor might come at any moment, she said, and so perhaps it would be better if Raymond left his uncle for a little while. John Heath did not protest as much as she expected. He seemed absent-minded and thoughtful and, whenever she turned in his direction, she caught him regarding her with an odd expression. She

could guess what was behind that expression and she kept up a steady flow of chatter until Dr. Parker arrived.

That afternoon she expected to be called to account, but he did not mention the subject of the two thousand dollar check. Nor did he during the remainder of the week nor Sunday morning. As the time passed and he did not refer to the matter of the money, she began to wonder if Raymond had told him. Of course he must have done so; but why did he keep silent? Was he angry? Did he resent her interference with his private affairs?

Raymond took the Sunday afternoon train; he was returning to New York and his work. He was in high spirits. The Blodgett stock had opened on Wednesday morning a full five points higher than it had closed on Tuesday, his brokers had sold his holdings and his loss amounted to very little. He would be back again in Nauticook for another week-end very shortly and, so he declared, he would bring with him a check for a portion of the two thousand dollar loan.

"Good-by, Uncle John. I mean what I say—about that and the other things."

John Heath, sitting in the chair by the window, held out his hand.

"Good-by, boy," he said. "Good luck to you."

He watched the depot car move out of the yard, watched it till it disappeared over the crest of the hill. When Susan Harwell came into the room he was still looking after it.

"He's a fine young man, John," she said. "I don't wonder you're proud of him."

He did not speak. She bustled about for a few minutes, setting the room to rights, and then turned to go.

"Wait," he ordered.

She turned back. He was regarding her gravely and steadily. She realized what was coming and dreaded it. It

was inevitable, of course, but now that it had come, she was flurried.

"Well? What is it?" she asked, nervously. "Don't hinder me now if you can help."

"Sit down."

"No, I mustn't. I've got things to do in the kitchen."

"Maybe, but I've got things to say right here. Sit down."

She sat, reluctantly. He pulled at his mustache.

"For mercy sakes don't stare at me like that," she fidgeted, after a moment. "You give me the jumps."

He smiled. "Nothin' to what you've been givin' me for the last few days. You're a nice one, Susan Harwell."

"Nice one! Now what do you mean by that?"

"Hmph! If you don't know what I mean then you're a whole lot duller than you was when you went up to see Seth Crocker at the bank. Anybody who can draw two thousand dollars out of a four hundred account is slick enough to catch codfish in a well. What did you do it for?"

"I did nothin' that wasn't just plain common sense. I don't know what Raymond has been tellin' you, but—"

"There, there! What he told me was all nothin', most of it. 'Twas exactly what you told him. The main difference is that he believed it and I don't. *I* know what you did. You let that young fellow have two thousand dollars of your own money."

"Now, John Heath—"

"Hush! I've been thinkin' this thing out night and day ever since he told me. I rather guess I've got the answer. That insurance money—that from the Silver Cross lawyers you've been expectin' so long—must have come and you had put it in the bank. You hadn't said anything to me about it; there was no reason why you should of course."

She broke in quickly. "Don't be silly," she expostulated. "The only reason why I hadn't told you was that it didn't

come until the mornin' of the day you went away. I marched straight down to your shop that very afternoon to tell you and found everything shut up tight. Wonder you wouldn't let your friends know before you start off on trips. Where did you go, John?"

He shook his head. "No, no," he said, grimly, "you can't change the subject as easy as all that, my lady. We'll keep to the main channel for a while yet. So it was the insurance money? I cal'lated it must be, couldn't imagine any other way of your gettin' it from the bank folks. All that rigmarole about Seth's drawin' it from my account was bosh. He wouldn't have done it anyhow without my signature, even if I'd had that amount on deposit—which I didn't. So the Silver Cross folks paid up, finally, eh?"

"Yes. They sent me a check for twenty-eight hundred dollars, considerable more than I ever expected to get. One of the things I was comin' to see you about was to ask if you would invest it for me—you or Raymond. He was in the bankin' business and would know about such matters."

"Yes," dryly. "Well, between us 'twas 'invested' all right. Most of it anyway. You had twenty-eight hundred for a day or so, and now you've got eight. Quick work. Susan, what did you do it for? Losin' your senses, are you?"

She flushed. "It *was* sense—nothin' but common sense. The poor boy was in a dreadful state, that was plain for anybody to see. I was as worried about him, almost, as I was about you. Between his distress over you, not knowin' yet whether you would live or die, and what was weighin' on his mind, he couldn't keep still. He was walkin' up and down the floor and—well, once, when he went out of the house, I thought he might be goin' down to that awful wharf again. . . . Oh, it's all right! He didn't."

He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"John," she asked, impulsively, "what really happened

down at that wharf? What were he and you doin' there at six o'clock that mornin'?"

He did not answer. "Go on with your yarn," he ordered. "Tell me the rest."

"There isn't much more of it. After I'd got him back into the house again I made him understand that he must tell me what his trouble was. He didn't want to, I guess—that is, in one way, but in another I imagine he did. Probably he was in a condition where he just had to tell somebody."

He nodded. "How much did he tell?" he asked.

"Why, all there was. I guess. That he had borrowed all that money and that, if it wasn't paid back in a few days, he didn't know what might happen to him."

"That all?"

"All! It was enough, wasn't it?"

"Then what?"

"Then? Why, then I understood and I was as frightened as he was. It seemed as if I must get that money some way. If you had been well I knew you would give it to him."

"Didn't he tell you what I'd said to him the night before? That I didn't have a quarter of two thousand to my name?"

"Well—yes," reluctantly, "he did; but of course I knew—"

"Wait. Did he tell you I said I wouldn't let him have it anyhow—whether I had it or not?"

She was astonished and indignant. "Certainly he didn't," she declared. "Why would he tell me such rubbish as that? If he had I shouldn't have paid any attention to it. I know you, John Heath, and I know what you think of that boy. You'd have raised that two thousand for him somehow."

"Don't know what I'd have done. Anyhow, that's neither here nor there. You did it for me. And—and *how* am I goin' to pay it back to you?"

"You don't have to pay it back yet awhile. Time enough to think about that when you're well again. You can pay me

interest on it, if you want to. I was goin' to ask you to invest the insurance money for me—you remember I said I was—and we'll call this an investment. That's all it is, really. . . . Now may I go and attend to my cookin'?"

"Ain't you goin' to let me as much as say 'Thank you'?"

"No. There's no need of thanks. It was just plain sense. I had the money layin' idle and how could I use it better? There was no risk about it."

His chin squared. "There shan't be," he vowed. "I'll see to that. Give me a week on my feet and out of this house and you'll have your money; somehow or other you'll have it."

"Now, John—"

"Oh, don't!" impatiently. "Susan, why did you do it?"

"Why wouldn't I do it? Raymond was in trouble—awful trouble."

"Raymond is no relation of yours."

"He's *your* relation, isn't he?"

"No."

She stared at him, aghast.

"Why—why, John Heath!" she cried. "How can you talk so! I believe—I'm afraid—"

"All right, all right. I'm sane enough. I said more than I meant to, that's all. . . . Oh well," with a long sigh, "I may say more than that before I finish. You go and see to your cookin'. I want to think another spell."

She was still rather alarmed, but when he repeated his request that she leave him for a time, she did so. The doctor came, expressed satisfaction with the condition in which he found his patient and went away prophesying complete recovery in a very short time. Heath paid scant attention and talked very little, even for him. His appetite for dinner was fair, but it was evident that he was scarcely aware what he was eating. Mrs. Harwell feared that he was worry-

ing concerning the two thousand dollars and so she, too, was disturbed.

At four that afternoon he called to her. She rose from her chair in the living room and hastened to answer the call.

"For goodness gracious sakes!" she exclaimed, as she entered. "What are you doin' out of bed?"

He shook his head. "I can talk better sittin' up. You sit over yonder and let me talk."

"John Heath, how *can* you act so! Why didn't you call me to help you, if you was bound to get up anyway?"

"You've helped me enough. Too much for your own good, I'm afraid. All hands in Nauticook know, of course, that you're down here livin' alone with me. What do you suppose they're sayin' about it?"

She laughed aloud. "Is that what has been frettin' you all day!" she exclaimed, in relief. "I knew there was somethin'. Oh, John, John, what a ninny you are about some things. Don't be so ridiculous."

"Susan, I can't make you out. Why did you let Raymond have that money?"

"I've told you a dozen times. I like Raymond."

"That ain't quite enough. I suppose you did it because you thought you was helpin' me, just as you're stayin' on here to help me now. That's the truth, isn't it?"

She was embarrassed, but she tried to laugh it off.

"Well—well, if it is, that's reason enough, I should think. I haven't got so many friends that I can afford to let one of 'em lie between life and death without walkin' far as from Mrs. Bangs' down here."

"You count me a friend?"

"Why, what a question! Certainly I count you as a friend. Yes, and a good friend, too."

"You don't know anything about me."

"I know enough."

"You don't know anything. If you did, maybe—Susan, I'm goin' to tell you some things that not one soul in Nauticook but me does know. Not even Raymond—he doesn't know 'em."

He spoke with such deadly seriousness and his manner was so peculiar that she was vaguely disturbed.

"John," she protested quickly, "be careful. Don't tell me anything you may wish later on that you hadn't. There is no reason why you should. I'm not a bit curious."

"The Lord knows you've had cause enough to be. You must have guessed there was a whole lot behind this—this accident of mine. I shouldn't wonder if Raymond let out a lot more to you than he thinks he did or that you've owned up to. I was hard to him that night—mighty hard. . . . Well, I had my reasons, or I thought I had."

He ceased speaking and sat, frowning, not looking at her, but at the floor. She did not know what to do or say. She would have liked to go away, she felt an odd reluctance to listen to what he evidently meant to tell; but she knew that he would not let her go.

After an interval he went on.

"Yes," he said, as if in answer to his own unspoken question. "Yes, I'm goin' to tell it. I warn you now, before I begin, that it's a rotten yarn. You know—everybody knows—that I was born here in Nauticook and lived here while I was a boy. Then my mother and I went away. What happened after that is the part I've never told anybody. They all think—everybody around here—that I am a bachelor. I ain't. When I was a young man I married."

She gasped, involuntarily. He looked up and then down again.

"That surprises you? Yes, well, I'm goin' to surprise you more."

He went on to tell the story of his marriage, of his wife's elopement with Condon, of his leaving Fox Harbor, his

voyages on the fishing schooner, his rough life ashore, his return to Nauticook. He kept nothing back, offered no excuses, stated the bare facts without elaboration or unnecessary explanation. He covered the years of his life as a fisherman in the village in a few sentences. Then he told of the letter from Mr. Coxley and the meeting with Raymond which followed.

"You see, he was my own son," he said. "That was what made me take to him so from the very beginnin'. My boy, he was. . . . Well, after that, he lived here with me and—but you know about that part. He got to be about the only thing that counted with me. I made a lot of mistakes—I wouldn't be me if I hadn't made 'em—indulged him too much, let him have more money than was good for him, made a fool of myself over him. He was a smart boy—yes, he was—and he is yet. This snarl he got himself into over in New York was more my fault than his. I brought him up wrong. I can see that now. Lorenzo kept tellin' me I was spoilin' him, and of course I was."

She would have interrupted, but he motioned her to be quiet.

"I've only begun," he said. "I've tried to make you realize that I was a good deal of a fool. What a fool I really was I didn't realize myself until—until a couple of weeks ago."

He told her of the letter from the Brayton bank. Then, still in the same impersonal, uncompromising manner, he went on to the end. He kept nothing back—or almost nothing. The one exception was Raymond's taking the Gilder bonds, that he omitted; it was Raymond's secret, not his.

"And so there you are," he said, in conclusion. "I came back, sick of all creation, sick of Raymond, and sickest of all of myself. I had made up my mind, or I thought I had, to get clear of Nauticook and everybody in it. I hated 'em all, and that boy most of anybody. Then when he came out with that yarn about his—about his borrowin' that money

and speculatin' with it, it was the final punch, as you might say. I said things to him that I hadn't any right to say. I as good as told him to go to the devil. That was where I intended to go, myself, and I sent him there ahead of me. . . . And then, in the mornin', I seemed to feel different about it somehow. Whose child he was didn't count so much. After all, it wasn't his fault. And, so far as the money went, if I'd taught him to be more careful and savin', if I hadn't let him think all he needed to do was to come to me when he needed cash, why—"

She broke in. "Oh, don't!" she cried. "*Don't* say such things about yourself! I won't let you."

He looked up in surprise. "Eh?" he queried. "Oh well, that's all nothin'. I guess likely I've tired you pretty well out. It's about the finish, anyway. Only, that mornin', when I chased out in the rain and saw him down there at the end of the wharf, I—"

He stopped abruptly. She said nothing; she could not speak just then. He misinterpreted her silence.

"Well," he added, with a one-sided smile, "that's the end. What do you think of your 'friend' now? . . . Don't wonder you can't think of anything to say. What is there *to* say?"

She knew that she must speak now, and she spoke her thought.

"Oh, John," she cried, "why did you tell me all this? It was terrible for you. Why did you tell me—or any one? You shouldn't have done it."

He shrugged. "Don't know," he admitted. "I never meant to tell anybody, that's sure. I guess likely the boiler had to let off steam—or go up—one or the other."

"I wish you hadn't. . . . No, I don't, I'm glad you did! It makes me understand—oh, so many things."

"Huh! If you understand *me* it's more than I'm able to do."

She rose and, coming over to where he sat, laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You poor soul," she said, brokenly.

"Poor specimen of a man, you mean."

"No. No, I don't. I—I— Oh, please don't ask me to talk now. I just can't."

She hurried out of the room. It was a half hour later when she returned. He was still sitting in the chair by the window.

"There!" she said briskly. "*Now* I can talk. I've been thinkin' over all you've told me. As I said before it makes me understand a lot that has puzzled me since I first met you. But I still can't understand why you did tell me."

He shook his head. "Can't understand myself," he admitted. "Just felt as if I had to, some way. It's been sort of comin' over me for the last day or two that I was goin' to tell you. I should never have told any one else, that's certain. . . . Funny, that is, too. You're a woman and I thought I was done with women for good and all."

"I don't wonder at that."

"Well, I've told you, anyhow. I've been thinkin'— You see, Susan, I'm still troubled about Raymond. He ain't my son. When I came back here from Brayton I swore that I was through with him for keeps. Hated him, same as I said. But I *don't* hate him, that's the queerest part of it. I declare it seems as if I cared as much for him as ever I did. . . . Can you understand that?"

"Certainly I can. After all, what difference does it really make whose child he was in the beginnin'? He's been your boy now for a long time. You couldn't love a real son any more than you do him. No, and he could never care more for a father than he does for you."

"Think he does care, do you?"

"I know he does. Why, John Heath, do a little thinkin' yourself! In the midst of all his dreadful trouble, when he

was desperate enough to drown himself, didn't he forget it all when he saw you drownin'? Yes, and stay here in Nauticook by you and with you till he knew you was out of danger. That proves pretty well how much he cares for you, I should say."

He nodded. "Then what do you think I ought to do? Go on, same as I've been goin'—with him, I mean?"

"Why, of course."

"Don't think I'd ought to tell him what I've told you?"

"No. What good would that do either of you? It would only make him ashamed of his folks—and of himself. Don't tell him. He don't remember his father anyway, and all he remembers about his mother is good. Let it go at that, John. It's the only sensible thing, fair to him and to you. You and he go on just as you always have. Why not?"

He sighed. "Maybe you're right," he said, slowly. "I guess I shan't tell him, not for a long time anyhow, maybe never. What's the use?"

He looked out of the window for a moment. Then, without turning, he held out his hand.

"I'm obliged to you, Susan," he said. "I hope you know that."

"Oh now, John! If you mean about the money—"

"I don't. That is, I do, but the money's only part of it. That I'll pay you as soon as I'm out of this house. What I'm really obliged for is—well, your bein' what you are, the one person I could ever talk to—like this."

CHAPTER XIX

HE continued to gain strength and, two days later, the doctor permitted him to go out of doors for a little while. After that he went out regularly and, by the end of the following week, when Raymond came for the promised week-end visit, his recovery was practically complete. The next day—Monday—he went up to the village. When he returned he entered the living room and sat down in the rocker.

"Susan," he said, "what's all this I've been hearin' about Lo Weeks?"

She turned. "Oh, you've heard it, have you? Well, I might have known you would. It's what all hands have been talkin' about for the past four or five days. Just what did you hear?"

"Heard enough. It's true, of course—about his wife's runnin' off with that Jacobs scalawag?"

"I'm afraid it is. 'Cordin' to what they say, Lo came back to their house and found it shut up tight. He climbed in through a window and found she'd gone and taken about everything except the furniture with her. Jacobs is missin' too—so there's the answer, I guess."

"Hmph! . . . Tut, tut! . . . It happened 'most a week ago. Why did you never tell me about it?"

"What was the use of frettin' you about a shameful mess like that? You've had troubles enough."

He did not press the question. He knew why she had not told him. The wreck of Lorenzo's marriage was too closely similar to the wreck of his own.

"Well, well!" he muttered, slowly. "Poor old Lo! I've

been afraid of somethin' of the kind and I rather guess he has. That Jacobs must be an all-around blackguard."

"He is worse than that. The Anti-Jake folks have been lookin' him up and they found out things that might have landed him in jail if he'd stayed here. He never was a minister at all, just a rascal with a slick tongue. He had lost practically every follower he had except that Hulda. He had her mesmerized, I guess. Well, she'll pay for it before she's done."

"Poor Lo! Where is he; do you know?"

"He's still stayin' with those cousins of his down at South Nauticook. He was here to see you day before yesterday, but you were asleep and I wouldn't let him in. . . . Oh, now, don't worry about that. I told him to come again and he will, you may be sure."

"How did he seem?"

Susan smiled. "Well," she replied, "he was tryin' awful hard to look as if his heart was broke, but I don't think the crack is very deep. He groaned a good deal when he said good-by, but he was whistlin' when he went over the top of the hill. If you ask me, John, I think he's like a person who figured he was servin' a life sentence and has been pardoned out unexpected. What bothers him most, I judge, is bein' laughed at, but he ought to be used to that by this time."

They discussed the Weeks matrimonial catastrophe for a few minutes longer. Then, as she was leaving the room, he called her back.

"Susan," he said, "I went in to see Seth Crocker at the bank when I was up street."

She looked at him. "What did you do that for?" she asked, suspiciously. "John Heath, you haven't been foolish about that money, have you?"

"Sshh, shh! Told you I was goin' to fix that soon as I was able to be out, didn't I? Well, it's all fixed. Raymond

brought me a good-sized check when he came and I arranged with Seth for the rest. You'll have your two thousand back to-morrow."

"Now, John! I told you I didn't want it. I don't need it. You was goin' to pay me interest on it anyway. Goodness knows what sort of a deal you've made with those bank folks. Gone into debt, of course."

"Was in debt to you, wasn't I? Besides, things are lookin' up a little with me all to once. Found a letter in the box from Mrs. Seymour. She's been so busy with her war societies and such that I figured she was through with antiques for good and all. Seems she isn't. She'd bought a new summer place for herself over in Harniss and that rich nephew of hers has bought another. She wrote that she and he expect me to furnish 'em both with old stuff. Ought to be a full six months' job. Perhaps I won't have to go back to boatfishin' yet awhile, after all."

She flushed. "Splendid!" she cried, excitedly. "Oh, I'm so glad! Perhaps your luck has changed finally. Goodness knows you deserve it."

He shrugged. "I've been pretty lucky in some ways, as it is."

"I don't see how."

"Don't you? Well, about the luckiest stroke I ever did was when I put that ad in the paper and you answered it. Where would I be now—yes, and where would Raymond be —if it wasn't for you?"

She said "Bosh!" but when she had gone he could hear her singing in the kitchen. It was a pleasant, homey sound. Lorenzo had sung much, during his Pure in Heart seizures, but his singing was neither pleasant nor homelike. The question of what sort of a home Seven-up would be when she had gone and he was alone in it returned to trouble him. She would be going soon—she would have to go back to her

work at the Bangs cottage before long. She ought to go now.

Lorenzo called before the afternoon was over. He moped into the living room a picture of misery. His handshake was a sad ceremony. He sank into the chair Heath offered him as if he were in the last stages of debility, mental, physical and spiritual. He cheered up slightly, however, at the offer of a cigar and his comment, as he lighted it, was significant.

"Sins to mercy," he sighed, blowing a fragrant cloud, "that tastes good! Well, I can enjoy some things yet—don't see why I shouldn't."

"I don't either, Lo. Nobody to stop you, as I know of."

"No. Ain't nobody to stop me doin' nothin' no more. Nobody gives a darn what I do. . . . Ah hum! S'pose you've heard all about it by this time, Hi?"

"Yes."

"Yes, you would. . . . I can't get used to it. Right now, settin' here, seems as if I'd ought to keep lookin' over my shoulder. . . . You know, Hi," confidentially, "I ain't had a good smoke, in a reg'lar room like this, for goodness knows how long. Marietta, she's my cousin where I'm livin', she don't like tobacker in the front part of the house—says it smells up the curtains. Me and Heman have to smoke out in the back kitchen."

"Well, even that's an improvement, ain't it?"

"Soul to body, I guess 'tis! Why, Hi, if you'll believe it, I used to sneak out and smoke in the henhouse when I was to home—the place I used to call home, I mean. 'Twa'n't very comf'table but 'twas safe. The hens might cackle, but they didn't fly at a feller."

Heath asked if anything had been heard of the whereabouts of the eloping couple. Nothing had, and Lorenzo seemed glad of it.

"Let 'em go," he proclaimed defiantly. "Let 'em go. *I'm* through with 'em! If they expect me to chase 'em they must

be some disappointed by this time. I ain't that kind. When a woman leaves me she's left me for good."

"Didn't leave you much else, did she, Lo?"

"Huh! Hi, would you believe it, she's actually borrowed money on the furniture. Well, all right! I got along without no property afore and I can do it now."

Heath asked concerning the Society of the Pure in Heart. Were the Jakes and Anti-Jakes getting together again? Weeks, very red in the face, brushed the topic aside.

"Don't know and I don't care," he shouted. "'Cordin' to what I hear tell they're fighting' worse'n ever. One side's hollerin' 'I told you so' and t'other is talkin' about goin' to law to get their half of the Bethel. They don't interest me. If I go to meetin' from now on I'm just as liable to chum in with the Universalists as anywheres else. They don't believe in hell, but otherwise than that I don't know's they ain't as good as the average. They don't peddle out tracts anyhow," viciously.

When the talk drifted to Lorenzo's plans for his future he became very serious.

"That's what bothers me most just now, Hi," he said. "The first thing that come acrost my mind—after I got so that I *had* any mind—was 'Now I can go back and keep house for Hi Heath again.' That's what I thought, but—well, now I don't know."

"Don't, eh?" Heath was noncommittal.

"No, I don't. You see, Heman—my cousin-in-law—he's raked up a job for me over to South Nauticook. Down at the clam wharf 'tis, openin' quahaugs and oysters and helpin' 'round generally. I can board with him and Marietta reasonable, and I'd get fair wages. Besides—well, over there then I might not hear quite so much talk about—about what's happened. . . . You understand, Hi?"

"Sure. Good idea. Take the job if I was you, Lo."

"Ye-es, but it don't seem hardly right to leave you. That

is, it wouldn't if it wa'n't for her," with a jerk of the head toward the kitchen. "Long as she's goin' to stay with you steady you'll be looked out for, won't you?"

John Heath frowned.

"What do you mean—stay with me steady?" he asked, sharply.

"Why—why, she is, ain't she? Long's she's lost her job with old Mrs. Bangs all hands naturally cal'late she's hired on with you."

"Lost her job! Who says she's lost it?"

"Everybody. Seems that Becky Carver—the schoolmarm one—has decided to stay on up there for another year or two and so Mrs. Bangs give the Harwell woman notice. She liked her fine, but she didn't feel she could afford to keep two hired help, that's all. Didn't Mrs. Harwell tell you? . . . Wonder why she never."

During the remainder of the call Lorenzo did all the talking; Heath said scarcely a word. When the former rose to go, he hesitated. It was plain that he had something else on his mind, something he wished to say but found saying difficult.

"Well, so long, Hi. See you again pretty quick."

"Sure," absently. "Good-by, Lo."

"Yes, I—er— Say, Hi!"

"Eh? . . . Yes? What is it?"

Lorenzo glanced toward the kitchen door. Then he lowered his voice.

"Say, Hi," he whispered anxiously, "'tain't so, is it? I mean that other thing they're sayin'—about you and her? That you two are cal'latin' to get married?"

John Heath stared at him.

"*Married!*" he cried. "What the devil—?"

"Sshh, she'll hear you. Course I know 'tain't so and I tell 'em 'tain't, but that's the talk that's goin' 'round. They say that you and her have been keepin' comp'ny ever since

she come to Nauticook and that, if you wasn't goin' to marry her, 'tain't likely she'd be tendin' you and nursin' you all alone here the way she's done. I—"

"Shut up! . . . If you say another word like that I'll throw you out. Married! For heaven's sake why would she —or anybody else—marry *me?* By the Lord A'mighty, this town is—is—"

"My sins alive, don't holler so! Nor look so, neither. *I* never said it. I tell Heman and Marietta that if there's one thing you've got—yes, and had all your life—is sense enough to stay single. 'Unless that crack on the head had made him plumb crazy,' I says, 'he ain't goin' to do no such fool thing.' And, as for this Harwell woman—"

"Clear out!"

"Eh? Aw now, Hi, if you're goin' to get mad—"

"Be still. . . . There, there! I ain't mad—not at you. I don't want to hear any more now, that's all. Clear out, will you!"

Lorenzo went. John Heath sank back in his chair. He was silent and moody all the rest of the day and evening. Susan asked no questions. The kitchen door did not fit snugly and, although she had not meant to listen, she had heard a few words of the latter part of the dialogue with Mr. Weeks. She did not wish to talk any more than he did. Their conversation, the little there was of it, was strained and quite impersonal.

It was not until the following forenoon that it became less so. It was a gray day, and Seven-up was wrapped in a heavy fog. He came out into the dining room, where she was at work, and stood, looking at her and pulling his mustache. She did not look at him, she was polishing the table silver and she kept on doing so.

She heard him draw a long breath. Then he asked: "How long are you goin' to stay here?"

She pretended not to understand.

"Stay where?" she asked, without turning.

"Here, in this house, with me?"

"Oh, I don't know. Until you tell me to get out, I suppose. Until the doctor says you're well enough to be left, anyhow."

"Where are you goin' then? . . . Oh now," with an impatient wave of the hand, "don't back and fill. I know you're through up at Mrs. Bangs's. Lo told me all about that."

"I'm not through. I can stay there another month—yes, or longer. Mrs. Bangs begged me to stay with her, at least until I found another place. She's an awfully good woman. You mustn't blame her, John. With Miss Becky there she doesn't need me at all."

He made no comment on this statement; it did not seem to interest him.

"What have you planned to do?" he persisted.

"I haven't planned much. After you are well enough to be left I imagine I'll go to Boston. There are some folks of mine there, Aunt Maria's cousins they are, and I rather guess they can find me somethin' to do. Don't worry about me. I ain't one of your antiques, not yet. I can look out for myself."

He nodded. "Yes," he muttered, "I guess that's right. You *can* look out for yourself, if you ever will; but, far's I can learn you've spent the best part of your life lookin' out for other folks. How much longer are you goin' to stay here in this house, Susan? That's what I'm askin' you."

"I told you. Until you are well enough for me to go."

"Don't you think I'm well enough now?"

"I know you're not."

"Suppose I told you to go this minute?"

"I shouldn't stir. Don't be silly, John Heath. You know you can hardly crawl around. Walkin' up street yesterday tired you, you know it did. Besides, I promised Raymond I

wouldn't leave till the doctor and I were sure you were all right. I shan't—so don't argue any more."

He gave his mustache another tug.

"Do you know what they're sayin' already about your livin' here with me?" he demanded.

For the first time she turned to face him.

"Are you harkin' back to *that* foolishness again!" she exclaimed. "How many times must I tell you I don't care what they say?"

"I care. . . . I care about you. I care a whole lot too much to have your name hawked around Nauticook the way —well, the way they're doin' with Hulda Weeks's. I won't have it, that's all."

"*I* haven't run off with a medicine show fakir."

"All nothin'. I won't have it, I say. Will you go now, Susan?"

"No, I won't," with sharp decision. "You ain't fit to take care of yourself. So far as that goes," impulsively, "you never have been and you never will be. . . . Oh, I don't mean that! I mean—well, I mean you hadn't ought to try. If I could only find some real capable person to take care of this house—and you—I might go pretty soon. Can you think of any such person, John?"

"Ain't tried. I've been thinkin' a whole lot since Lo was here yesterday, but, I haven't thought about that. No," emphatically, "and I don't want to. Susan, I wish you'd give me a straight answer. Why are you doin' all this, stayin' here, workin' for little or nothin', riskin' all the talk—why are you doin' it? Would you do it for anybody else: just anybody that come along?"

She had turned back to the silver polishing. He repeated the question.

"No, I suppose likely I wouldn't," she confessed. "Certainly I wouldn't for anybody I didn't like."

"Then you like me; is that it?"

"Why, of course I like you. I told you the other day that I counted you as the best friend I had. I don't leave my friends when they're in trouble. . . . Dear me," with a nervous laugh, "you are in a tearin' hurry to get rid of me, that's a fact."

The remark had a curious effect upon him. He took a step toward her and then halted.

"Get rid of you!" he repeated, his voice shaking. "Don't talk that way, Susan—don't! It's the idea that I've got to get rid of you—that I must, for your sake—that's been raisin' hob with me ever since yesterday. Yes, and before that, only I wouldn't let myself look the facts in the face. If I had my way I'd *never* get rid of you. Never, so long as I lived. What on earth I'm goin' to do without you I don't know."

"Oh, you'll find another housekeeper."

"I'll never find another *you*, will I? Don't you see? . . . No, of course you don't. Why should you? . . . Susan, I—I guess I've got where I'm next door to crazy. I must be. Do you know what else they're beginnin' to say around Nauticook? Lo says—he says—"

"I know what he said and what he says they're sayin'. I heard him. That door doesn't shut very tight and I couldn't help hearin' a little there at the last."

"You heard—*that*. . . . Well—well, my Lord! that was crazy enough, wasn't it?"

"Why—perhaps it was, from your end of it."

"*My* end! Susan, I—I don't know what you mean. . . . Look here, you know what I am, what I've been most of my life. A poor, muddlin' fool. I'm John Heath, that's all; and when you've said that you've said enough."

"Enough for me, John."

"Enough for anybody. . . . How could John Heath, bein' what he is, and without a cent to his name, ask anybody to marry him?"

She had put down the fork she was at work upon.

"You don't ask it very well, that's a fact," she said, with a smile. "Oh, perhaps you aren't askin'."

"How can I? . . . Susan, if I was anybody but John Heath, and could ask you, would you marry me?"

"No."

"I thought not. . . . Well, that's that."

Now she turned. "But if *you* ask me I'll marry you, John," she said.

There was no more silver polishing that morning. There were far more important matters to occupy their minds. The conversation dealt mainly with themselves, but they also spoke of Raymond.

"He'll be surprised, I guess," she said.

"Shouldn't wonder. He likes you though, so I don't think he'll be hurt or anything like that. He's in favor of marriage, I judge, from things he told me about him and the Hazen girl. . . . I've been wonderin' what ought to be done about that money at the Brayton bank. If I had my way, of course, he'd never touch a cent of it, but it's his, you see. All he's got to do is prove he's Ralph Condon, Junior, and they'll pay it to him."

"Can he do that? I mean do you think he won't find out —what you found out up there? He mustn't find that out, John."

"I know. I don't believe he will. The bank folks don't know it, you see. I'll explain to them and to him that the name was a mistake and he'll be so tickled to get the money that he won't ask any more. I want to plan it all out a little before I mention the thing to him, but I guess I can find a safe way. I'll let it drift till I do."

After another interval she said: "John, there is just one thing I must be sure about. You are not marryin' me on

account of what Lorenzo Weeks said to you—about the talk in Nauticook, I mean? That isn't the reason?"

He laughed. It was his first hearty laugh since the day before his trip to Brayton.

"There are plenty of reasons," he declared, "but that ain't one of 'em. And, see here—this is what *I* want to know: You ain't marryin' me just because you think I need somebody to take care of me?"

"Not altogether. Though I will say that I haven't meant —for a long time, I haven't—to let any one else take care of you if I could help it."

He gave up; plainly the puzzle was beyond his solving. "I can't understand it," he vowed. "No, I can't."

"Of course you can't. You wouldn't be John Heath if you could. . . . Well, there! look at that clock! If we're goin' to have any dinner to-day I should say 'twas high time I was gettin' it."

She rose and went to the window.

"Why, John," she cried, "the sun is tryin' to come out. The wind has sprung up and the fog is almost gone. It's blowin' clear."

He drew a long breath. "Yes," he said, wonderingly, "I declare I believe maybe it is—at last."

THE END

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